Human experience and Triune God: Theological exploration of the relevance of human experience for Trinitarian theology

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HUMAN EXPERIENCE AND THE TRIUNE GOD

A Theological Exploration of the Relevance of Human Experience for Trinitarian Theology

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A THEOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE RELEVANCE OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE FOR TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

Abstract

The overarching aim of this work is to develop a new account of the doctrine of the Trinity that is more attentive to human experience. It will be argued that such an approach is overdue because contemporary trinitarian theology pays insufficient attention to the fact that theology as linguistic discourse is inescapably embedded in human experience. This neglect is particularly worrying because many theologians who favour a kind of social doctrine of the Trinity claim that the Trinity is a doctrine with practical consequences for human life. The main thrust of this project, therefore, is to link the doctrine of the Trinity more creatively with human experience and to develop an understanding of how and who the triune God is in relation to human life as it is lived and experienced by human beings.

The discussion is divided into five chapters. Chapter One highlights the need for a new approach engaging in a critical discussion with some trinitarian theologians. By giving close attention to the concepts of experience and revelation and their embeddedness in language, Chapter Two aims at establishing an understanding of experience that underlies all human linguistic discourse. This account will lead to the conclusion that trinitarian discourse must pay proper attention to both the human condition as experienced by human beings and religious experience which is expressed in biblical narratives. Consequently, while Chapter Three, drawing on contributions from contemporary literature, the human sciences (Frankl, Weizsäcker) and philosophy (Levinas), gives an account of what it is to be human, Chapter Four, engaging with biblical narratives, tries to spell out how biblical experience might inform trinitarian discourse. In conclusion, Chapter Five offers an interstitial trinitarian theology that maintains such discourse as creative tension. An account of the Trinity in relation to human life will emerge and draw the whole argument to a close.

HUMAN EXPERIENCE AND THE TRIUNE GOD

A Theological Exploration of the Relevance of Human Experience for Trinitarian Theology

Bernhard Nausner

For Lynn

my love,

my life

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No material of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

INTRODUCTION

The overarching aim of this work is to develop a new account of the doctrine of the Trinity that is more attentive to human experience. It will be argued that such an approach is overdue because contemporary trinitarian theology pays insufficient attention to the fact that theology as linguistic discourse is inescapably embedded in human experience. This neglect is particularly worrying because many theologians who favour a kind of social doctrine of the Trinity claim that the Trinity is a doctrine with practical consequences for human life. However, one might ask how one can relate the doctrine of the Trinity to human life if neither the role of human experience nor the question of what it is to be human is adequately addressed? The main thrust of this project, therefore, is to link the doctrine of the Trinity more creatively with human experience and to develop an understanding of how and who the triune God is in relation to human life as it is lived and experienced by human beings. Hence the title *Human Experience and the Triune God.*

Current debates about the doctrine of the Trinity, it is my contention, suffer from one-sidedness. Some take place on purely philosophical levels deeply involved with the task of unravelling the confused threads of traditional doctrinal formulations and modern philosophical questions. These debates usually tend to give precedence to the notion of the *one* God over the notion of the three persons. Other works start from salvation history, taking it simply for granted that God is *three persons*, hence prioritising the notion of communion. What all of these discussions lack, however, despite their different agendas, is not only a proper engagement with the complex relationship between the concepts of revelation and experience but also a productive imagination, namely that theological discourse is not so much in need of logical conclusions but rather of sustaining a creative tension between the notions of the One and the Three.

In order to establish that contention, there is much in what follows not only about the close relationship between *experience* and *revelation*, but also about the creative tension within theological discourse between the *concept* and the *narrative* and the notions of *one ousia* and *three hypostaseis*. Much will be said about both the inappropriateness of logical conclusions that simply prioritise one perspective over against the other and the tendency either to downplay human experience in favour of

metaphysics or to give precedence to revelation history over against conceptual starting points. What I am attempting to offer, therefore, is an alternative approach towards trinitarian theology and to establish what I want to call an interstitial theology that moves in the interstices between revelation and experience. As a corollary of this basic argument, I want to persuade the reader that in order to link the doctrine of the Trinity with, and to be able to draw, practical implications for human life, contemporary trinitarian theology (if it wants to be truthful not only to the triune God as the giver and sustainer of creation but also to Scripture and the Christian tradition) needs to pay more attention to the general nature of the human condition and to biblical experience. To this end, much will be argued in favour of the integration of both general human experience as it is conceptualised within the human sciences and religious experience as it comes to speech in biblical narratives as life lived in relation to God.

The discussion that follows is divided into five chapters. Chapter One is concerned with the general context of the above-mentioned issues. Focusing on the connection between the Trinity and human life within contemporary trinitarian theology, the need for a new approach that is more attentive to human experience will be highlighted. Chapter Two then establishes a new argument, retrieving human experience for a trinitarian hermeneutics. By giving close attention to the concepts of experience and revelation and their embeddedness in language, an understanding of experience will emerge that underlies all human linguistic discourse. This account will lead to the conclusion that trinitarian discourse must pay proper attention to both the human condition as experienced by human beings and religious experience which is expressed in biblical narratives. Consequently the following two chapters will focus on these issues. While Chapter Three, putting emphasis on general human experience, gives an account of what it is to be human, Chapter Four, engaging with biblical narratives, tries to spell out how biblical experience might inform trinitarian discourse. Drawing all the threads together in Chapter Five, building on the findings from the previous chapters, I will attempt to propose a trinitarian interstitial theology that maintains discourse as creative tension. An account of the Trinity in relation to human life will emerge and draw the whole argument to a close. In a brief conclusion, looking back at the whole discussion and also offering a note of prospect, I will claim that the theology here proposed is not only needed but also most promising if trinitarian theology wants to sustain the conviction that the doctrine of the Trinity is a doctrine with practical consequences for human life.

It should therefore be noted from the very outset that this thesis is concerned neither with a justification of the doctrine of the Trinity nor with an attempt to vindicate the triune understanding of God in confrontation with modern philosophy. I write as a committed Christian and engage here in an exercise of systematic theology. It is my belief, not only in view of my own religious experience and theological-philosophical reasoning but also in accord with the Christian tradition, that the trinitarian understanding of God, who revealed himself in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, is the appropriate content of the Christian faith.

Finally, two technical points have to be mentioned. First, to avoid any terminological confusion in regard to the structure of my chapters: chapters are divided into parts and parts are divided into sections and subsections. Secondly, footnotes in this work are not merely used as a reference system. Now and then, in order to keep the overall argument flowing, I also use footnotes to discuss, or to refer to, other works more extensively where I feel that the reader should know more about the reasons why certain decisions were made. Related discussions, therefore, that are relevant as background information but do not directly contribute to the flow of the argument will be briefly assessed in footnotes rather than in the body of the text.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEED FOR A FRESH APPROACH

1

THE NEED FOR A FRESH APPROACH

1.1 INTRODUCTION: THE PROMISE OF TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

'The doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately a practical doctrine with radical consequences for Christian life.'[1] This conviction of Catherine LaCugna summarizes the underlying attitudes of many theologians who have worked on the Trinity over the last three decades.[2] Many theological works have emerged and many discussions have taken place on the academic level to re-conceive and re-consider the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity for our understanding of God and, as many theologians have pointed out, to shed new light on Christian understanding of personhood, community and human life. It is the merit of Karl Barth's salient work that there exists wide agreement among theologians that, if we want to develop a doctrine of God, we need to look at God's self-revelation in salvation history and there is therefore set before us the problem of conceiving God in a triune way as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[3] Subsequently Karl Rahner formulated the much-debated phrase, 'the "economic" Trinity is the "immanent" Trinity and the "immanent" Trinity is the "economic" Trinity.'[4] The works of these two theologians promoted an enriching ecumenical discussion about the doctrine of God.[5] Many followed this path and enlightened the understanding of God through profound studies of the doctrine of the Trinity within church history as well as through engaging in a dialogue with modern philosophy. Robert Jenson, for example, summarizes: 'All that can be said about the point that trinitarian theology *has*, will be false unless we simultaneously think the point that trinitarian theology *is*.'[6] Here, Jenson indicates quite

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[1] Catherine M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 1. See also Gerald O'Collins, *The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), 1; Patricia Fox, *God as Communion: John Zizioulas, Elizabeth Johnson, and the Retrieval of the Symbol of the Triune God* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 1-3.

[2] For a brief overview: Fred Sanders, 'Trinity Talk, Again', *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 44 (2005), 264-72.

[3] Cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 299.

[4] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 22. Cf. Fred Sanders, 'Entangled in the Trinity: Economic and Immanent Trinity in Recent Theology', *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 40 (2001), 175-82.

[5] However, the wider context should not be forgotten, as Samuel Powell has recently pointed out, namely, 'that Trinitarian thought would not have enjoyed its twentieth-century revival without Hegel's prior setting of the stage': *The Trinity in German Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 258.

[6] Robert Jenson, 'What Is the Point of Trinitarian Theology?', in C. Schwöbel (ed.), *Trinitarian Theology Today* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), 43.

clearly that we have no choice whether we want to deal with the Trinity or not. God as the triune God simply *is*. Moreover, if the language of the doctrine of the Trinity enables us in the most appropriate way to speak of God and to comprehend and describe his being, then this language should influence and determine our elaboration of vital and relevant teachings for the shaping of Christian life. The underlying motivation for many theologians is that, by deducing their concepts of God from an understanding of the perichoretical communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, they can overcome a Christian monotheism, based on a sharp distinction between the concepts of nature or essence and persons or relations (which puts the principle of the One over the principle of the Three).

To escape this dilemma, the dualism between the One and the Many, the dialectic between unity and plurality which lies at the heart of much of trinitarian discussion thus seems to be a promising way, when one realises that the so-called post-modern world is to a large degree a world of paradox, in which people praise their individual freedom and at the same time are more entangled than ever in conditions of dependence. It is a world that has never known more about the multiplicities and differences of people, personhood, human races and cultures and simultaneously wants to standardize and homogenize this world in a dangerous way – be it on an economical, a political or even a sporting level – and thereby often creates new forms of oppression and exploitation. We have a world that thought it could eliminate belief in God through a vast increase of scientific research and by substituting God with the "modern self", but in the meantime it is confronted with a boom in all different kinds of religious and esoteric movements, an increase of natural disasters or new fatal diseases, not to forget a widening gap between poor and rich. Regarding these problems, it seems to me that the question of how we can conceive ourselves as human beings in relation to God and to the human other and consequently how we can create and organise human community without falling into the fatal pit of absolutism by putting the One over the Many or the Many over the One, is extremely pertinent.

To perceive the being of God as an everlasting communion rather than an unmoveable, unchangeable substance or nature has become the crucial point for doing trinitarian theology, to do justice to the kind of divine self-disclosure as it appears in Scripture as well as to face the problems of modern society more relevantly in offering new and hopefully more accurate answers in the search for a better understanding of creation, humankind and salvation. A theology that endeavours to take up accountability

in such a way attempts to elaborate different realms of theological discourse through a dialogue with a trinitarian understanding of God without – to speak with the Great Tradition – succumbing to the dangers of subordinationism, modalism or tritheism. To put it in a nutshell: Trinitarian theology with its emphasis on the concept of communion has become for many theologians a framework for doing theology.[7]

In view of this, the main focus of this chapter will be to scrutinize and challenge this highly praised "promise of trinitarian theology." My aim is to highlight the need for a new approach by revealing major blind spots and inconsistencies within contemporary theology in regard to this claim that emphasis on notions of communion and relationality leads to practical implications for human life. It is not that the practical conclusions drawn are always wrong, but that they are inadequately founded. Hence my main concern, although not exclusively, lies with theologians who favour a kind of social doctrine of the Trinity. Nonetheless, the legitimacy of the title 'The need for a fresh approach' is grounded in findings that penetrate a wider range of contemporary trinitarian discourse. The discussion that follows is divided into three parts. Part one (1.2) looks through the prism of contemporary theology. My goal is to engage in a critical dialogue with three theologians - Jürgen Moltmann, Catherine LaCugna and Colin Gunton - and to examine their understanding of God as being-in-communion and the implications they draw. This discussion will, on the one hand, identify primary convictions within trinitarian discourse and, on the other, highlight some common weaknesses and inconsistencies. In part two (1.3) I would like to change the perspective and look through the prism of the Church and human experience. My aim is to reflect on the correlations between ministry and theology, faith and Church, then move on to address two major concerns, namely the problems of what I would call ecclesiological and metaphysical captivity, and finally highlight the neglect of biblical and general human experience. This investigation will support and enforce the findings of the previous part. Drawing the threads together in the third part (1.4), I will briefly summarize the discussion and single out the main issues that will lead the way into the following chapters.

[7] C. Schwöbel, 'Trinitätslehre als Rahmentheorie des christlichen Glaubens', *Marburger Jahrbuch für Theologie* 10 (1998), 129-54.

1.2 THROUGH THE PRISM OF CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

1.2.1 Moltmann: The inappropriate integration of power structures

Jürgen Moltmann takes the New Testament traditions as the point of departure for his trinitarian theology in order to develop a historic doctrine of the Trinity.[8] It is his conviction that the New Testament speaks of God by narrative proclamation of the communitarian relations between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that are open to the world.[9] With this premise in mind he pursues the form and appearance of the Trinity within the different realms of Jesus' life and asks about the understanding of the sending, the giving up, the exaltation and the future of the Son. By doing this it becomes clear in all these realms of investigation that Jesus' life can only be adequately understood in trinitarian terms. In particular, this is highlighted by Moltmann's interpretation of Jesus' death on the cross. The giving up of the Son reveals pain and suffering in God which can only be perceived in trinitarian terms or not at all.[10] Consequently we have to interpret the cross-event from a trinitarian perspective; otherwise we are ultimately not able to speak of God's love and accordingly God does exist on the cross. Thus, Moltmann describes the shape and the appearance of the Trinity as a relational event in which Father, Son and Holy Spirit form an interwoven and interdependent community: the Father gives his own Son up for us to absolute death and the Son gives himself up for us. This joint sacrifice of the Father and of the Son in turn happens through the Holy Spirit who unites the Son in his forsakenness with the Father.[11]

An essential part in Moltmann's approach plays on the insight that he discovers different orders of the trinitarian communion within the distinct realms of the history of God. In virtue of this one can assert that in respect of the sending of the Son, it is the Father who sends the Son through the Spirit. According to the biblical narratives it is the Spirit which comes to the Son from the Father. But if one looks toward the exaltation of the Son, an alteration of this order can be observed. The conditions are turned upside down in such a way that now the risen Christ sends the Spirit. This means that the Trinity is open in the sending of the Spirit.[12] God's history with the world and

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[8] Jürgen Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1994), 34. Hereafter: [*Trinität*].
[9] *Trinität*, 80.
[10] *Trinität*, 99.
[11] *Trinität*, 99.
[12] *Trinität*, 106.

with humanity remains open; God remains turned toward us. Furthermore, Moltmann notices another alteration of the trinitarian order within eschatology, when he explains that all activity flows from the Son and from the Spirit and that the Father is the receiver of the kingdom and the glory.[13]

Out of these considerations, Moltmann argues that the dogmatic tradition with its fixation on the trinitarian order "Father – Son – Spirit" is not in accordance with the New Testament testimony. A vital implication for the concept of God, therefore, is that the unity of the Triunity is not a monadic one. Thus he concludes that the unity of the divine Triunity lies in the union of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and not in a numeric unity. Rather the unity lies in their communion and not in the identity of a singular subject.[14] This understanding shapes Moltmann's idea of a social doctrine of the Trinity, in which he conceives God 'as three divine subjects in interpersonal relationship with each other – a fellowship of love' and portrays the life of God as 'a life of living fellowship and a process of expression of the divine life through mutual manifestation.'[15]

Although Moltmann's social approach to the doctrine of the Trinity is deeply grounded in his concern for liberation, political injustice and the experience of suffering, and thus deals very passionately with human experience and the underside of history,[16] there are some inconsistencies which should not be overlooked. Moltmann uses his social model of the Trinity as a paradigm for human sociality and community, which leads him to the conclusion that it is not the perfected single individual but the perfected and fully developed human community of persons that should be called the image of God on earth.[17] But in order to do so and to draw implications for the human community as the image of God he ultimately has to apply the term "person" to the three divine persons in the same way we do to human persons.[18] It seems to me that - only in virtue of such a strong analogy - is he subsequently able to state that the correspondence with the unity of the divine perichoretic community of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit lies precisely in a human community of persons without

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[13] *Trinität*, 109.
[14] *Trinität*, 111.
[15] Richard Bauckham, 'Jürgen Moltmann's *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* and the Question of Pluralism', in Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 158.
[16] See especially his *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).
[17] *Trinität*, 173.
[18] Cf. Bauckham, 'Jürgen Moltmann's *The Trinity*', 161-2.

privileges and without dependencies.[19] This statement is puzzling not only because Moltmann himself warns that such parallels and analogies are misleading,[20] but also because he insists on the conclusion that, after rejecting different patterns of Christian monotheism, it is theologically more significant to take the biblical narratives as a point of departure for developing an understanding of the unity of the three divine persons and not a philosophical postulate.[21] But as he himself demonstrates by his close examination of the New Testament testimony, there is not only, for instance, talk about obedience between the Father and the Son, but also a strong sense of particularity which distinguishes the divine persons from one another.[22] Consequently, Moltmann's observation of the alteration of the trinitarian order seems to make sense only if we assume at the same time interdependence between the three divine subjects in interpersonal relationship. At least from this perspective one might ask Moltmann why the notions of particularity and dependence, obviously inherent in God's trinitarian relationship, and which automatically give rise to the question of power and authority, are not appropriately elaborated in his subsequent description of human sociality. Relationship and the notion of particularity in the sense that a person fulfils a unique task, which another does not, automatically involve structures of dependence.[23] Moltmann's use of the New Testament testimony, therefore, seems only to function as a criticism of the hierarchical order of the three divine persons within the discourse of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. Furthermore, beside Moltmann's own warning of the inadequacy of any analogy between the divine persons and human persons, he himself uses a particular understanding of divine communion - namely a social model of the Trinity, which in turn depends exactly on a concept of interpersonal relationship and thus on an analogy between divine and human communion (and in his case this is developed in opposition to a strict monotheism with monarchical and hierarchical structures) - in order to justify his conception of human sociality.[24]

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[19] *Trinität*, 174.

[20] 'Die „drei Personen" sind verschieden nicht nur hinsichtlich ihrer Relationen zueinander, sondern auch hinsichtlich ihrer Personalität, wenn anders die Person in ihren Relationen und nicht abgesehen von ihnen zu begreifen ist. Wollte man konkret bleiben müsste man für den Vater, den Sohn und den Geist einen je anderen Personenbegriff verwenden': *Trinität*, 205.

[21] *Trinität*, 167.

[22] See his *History and the Triune God* (London: SCM Press, 1991).

[23] Moltmann himself speaks of dependency: 'Die drei Personen sind als göttliche unabhängig, als Personen aber auf das engste miteinander verbunden und voneinander abhängig. Dieses relationale Verständnis der Personen setzt jedoch das substantielle Verständnis ihrer Individualität voraus und ersetzt es nicht': *Trinität*, 188.

[24] In *History and the Triune God* Moltmann strongly sets the image of a patriarchal Lord-God against a Jesus like Abba-Father-God. Samuel Powell suggests that this emphasis is also rooted in a rejection of Barth's theology: *The Trinity in German Thought*, 228-9.

Moltmann, in his search for a just world and liberation, substitutes too quickly for an ontology of the One an ontology of communion, which in the end does not solve the problems he wants to solve. This becomes obvious when one looks at his depiction of freedom where he sets the understanding of 'freedom as lordship' against 'freedom as communion'.[25] But even the best human communion depends on the division of jobs, duties and responsibilities and therefore cannot live and organize its communion without power structures. Moltmann puts the concept of *power* in opposition to the concept of *agreement and consensus*, arguing that an appropriate doctrine of the Trinity constitutes the Church as a community that is free from lordship. The trinitarian principle, Moltmann insists, substitutes the principle of power with the principle of agreement leading to the disappearance of authority and obedience, and finally giving rise to the practice of dialogue, consensus and harmony.[26] But this is surely a false opposition and demonstrates clearly some of the problems in analogy inherent in trinitarian theology. It is at this point that it becomes obvious that Moltmann's approach is one-sided. He treats human encounters and the dynamics of communitarian interactions too superficially. There is in fact no community without power structures. The conscious recognition of authority and its spheres of influence, for instance, if agreed upon by the parties involved, can certainly also be a sign of freedom, dialogue and consensus precisely as a way of overcoming accumulation of power or oppression. The search for a just and truly human account of sociality in our modern society and within our church communities, which are used to democratic structures and parliamentary power sharing, is however better conceived of as the search for an appropriate interpretation of the concepts of power and authority. It is misleading to neglect this interrelation and to label the concepts of power and authority as bad and evil in themselves or opposed to God's trinitarian being. To do so seems odd because in Moltmann's case one could argue the other way round and favour a more "power-dependent" trinitarian reading precisely because, as Moltmann himself emphasises, the alteration of order between the three divine persons implies also a change of the centre of activity and this of authority that moves from the Father to the Son and then to the Spirit. In other words, one could speak of a distribution of power with changing centres.

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[25] *Trinität*, 230-5. Cf. Henry Jansen, *Relationality and the Concept of God* (Amsterdam – Atlanta: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1995), 136: 'The most fundamental difficulty is Moltmann's distinction between freedom as lordship or the absolute power of disposal and freedom as community or generosity and his philosophical presupposition that the one excludes the other.' See also John O'Donnell, *Trinity and Temporality: The Christian Doctrine of God in the Light of Process Theology and the Theology of Hope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 156-8.

[26] *Trinität*, 219-20.

Moltmann fails to treat the concepts of power and authority in an appropriate way (inherent even in his model of *freedom as communion*) and thus is not able to develop a more fruitful description of human sociality.[27] In conclusion then it must be maintained that Moltmann's idea of a social doctrine of the Trinity fails paradoxically precisely in respect of his analogy of sociality and the notion of community. He ultimately neglects his own warning of misleading analogies and consequently is not able to integrate the indispensable concepts of power and authority into his model of sociality. A model of sociality without the notions of power and authority, especially when viewed through the prism of human experience, will not enhance a richer understanding of human personhood and communion but rather support a purely utopian view.

1.2.2 LaCugna: The confusion of *theologia* and *oikonomia*

In her investigation,[28] the American Catholic theologian Catherine LaCugna regains the significance of the Nicene Creed and highlights the theological work of the Greek Fathers and the one-sided development within Latin theology, which led to a deformation of the concept of God and subsequently relegated the doctrine of the Trinity ultimately to a sphere of insignificance. The merit of the Cappadocian theologians was (this is her claim) to separate and distinguish between the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis*, terms which up to their time had been used as synonyms for the discourse about God's being and subsequently contributed to the confusion and obscurity of the interpretation of the Nicene *homoousion*. At this point, one can observe a theological innovation. The precision of language, the separation of two synonyms and their subsequent fine and accurate distinction, enabled the Greek Fathers to think and conceive something new. The consequence of this move was that the Cappadocians could think of God's being as an everlasting and inseparable community. The significance of the phrase *mia ousia, treis hypostaseis*, therefore, depended exactly on the accurate distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis*. While *hypostasis* explained the distinction within the being of God (God's being precisely as three persons, as Father,

[27] This weakness also permeates his *The Spirit of Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). Under the heading of "The Fellowship and Person of the Spirit" Christian fellowship is too superficially characterized as friendship and solidarity.

[28] *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

Son and Spirit), *ousia* emphasised the one divine essence and the common divine substance.[29]

For the Greek Fathers, LaCugna contends, it was decisive to hold firm to this distinction in its inexchangeability, because otherwise we would not be able either to confess the particularity of the divine persons, which we must because of the biblical traditions, or to assert unity despite distinction, as a confession to the one and only God. In order not to succumb to the dangers of Arianism and Modalism, this clarification in language and thought was of great importance.[30] Furthermore, it must be stressed that for the Cappadocian theologians the one could not be thought of without the other. The three divine persons constitute and manifest ultimately the ineffable being of the one God. Words by Gregory Nazianzen impressively highlight this notion, when he poetically writes: 'I cannot think of the One without immediately being surrounded by the radiance of the Three; nor can I discern the Three without at once being carried back to the One.'[31] It is the merit of these theologians that the elaboration of the concept of God was not subordinated to a dangerous one-sidedness by giving priority either to the notion of unity or to plurality. Rather their theology expressed a dynamic interpenetration of the oneness and the threeness of God.[32]

LaCugna connects this approach with the conviction, that '[t]*heological* statements are possible not because we have some independent insight into God, or can speak from the standpoint of God, but because God has freely revealed and communicated God's *self*, God's personal existence, God's infinite mystery.'[33] Because God revealed himself in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and precisely in this way showed us his love, we know about God's trinitarian being. Our speech about God, thus, has to take up this trinitarian revelation as its starting point. Our speech about God is necessarily speech about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and therefore a speech about God in communion. This consideration leads LaCugna to the conviction

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[29] Cf. LaCugna, 'God in Communion with Us. The Trinity', in C. LaCugna (ed.), *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 83-114. However, some disagree with this interpretation of the Greek Fathers and the Latin West: Richard Fermer, 'The Limits of Trinitarian Theology as a Methodological Paradigm', *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 41 (1999), 158-86; Joseph Lienhard, '*Ousia* and *Hypostasis*: The Cappadocian Settlement and the Theology of "One *Hypostasis*"', in S. Davis, et. al. (eds.), *The Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 99-121.

[30] *God for Us*, 66-7.

[31] Oratio 40.41, quoted in Thomas Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 26.

[32] *God for Us*, 68. See also Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 150. Hereafter: [*The One*].

[33] Ibid., 3.

that the doctrine of the Trinity and the perception of God as the triune 'is not ultimately a teaching about "God" but a teaching about God's life with us and our life with each other. It is the life of communion and indwelling, God in us, we in God, all of us in each other.'[34] Central for conceiving *theologia* (modestly understood as the mystery of God) and *oikonomia* (the comprehensive plan of God reaching from creation to consummation) therefore are the concepts of relationship, personhood and communion.[35] A relational ontology consequently focuses on these concepts as a modality of all existence. In view of this LaCugna concludes: 'This relational ontology follows from the fundamental unity of *oikonomia* and *theologia*; God's To-Be is To-Be-in-relationship, and God's being-in-relationship-to-us *is* what God is.'[36]

Obviously, LaCugna wants to highlight that the Christian concept of God is a relational one. God's being is a being in relation, persons in communion and in virtue of that our understanding of God's nature, of his attributes and how God relates to us and to the world, must be developed on these grounds. But at this point several problems arise. LaCugna, following very closely Rahner's verdict that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa,[37] does not give due stress to the otherness of God and subsequently puts enormous stress on *oikonomia* for her elaboration of human personhood and community in the image of God. This leads her to the following conclusion: 'First, person, not substance, is the ultimate ontological category.' And '[t]he ultimate ground and meaning of being is therefore communion among persons.'[38] One is surprised that suddenly Gregory Nazianzen's statement seems to be forgotten and the balance between the One and the Three, between essence and persons is lost. In virtue of the unity between *theologia* and *oikonomia* and the subsequent shift towards the priority of persons in communion, LaCugna grounds her concept on the assertion that the revelation of divine personhood in the face of Christ is normative for a trinitarian ontology.[39] It seems to me that this assumption is grounded in a revelation positivism, which finds support in the following quotation:

> The clarification of personhood must always be referred to Jesus Christ, who is the communion of divine and human, and to the Holy Spirit, who transfigures and deifies human beings, uniting all persons, divine and human, in communion. While theology

[34] Ibid., 228.
[35] Ibid., 246. Cf. Stanley Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 153.
[36] Ibid., 250.
[37] For a critique of Rahner's Rule, Randal Rauser, 'Rahner's Rule: An Emperor without Clothes?', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 (2005), 81-94.
[38] *God for Us*, 14-5.
[39] Ibid., 15.

> stands to learn a great deal from cultural, anthropological, philosophical, and psychological approaches to personhood, the doctrine of the Trinity ultimately must measure its reflection on personhood by the revelation of divine personhood in the face of Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit.[40]

Here we are facing the methodological problem of an inappropriate order or juxtaposition of theology and human experience as it comes to speech within the human sciences. On the one hand, LaCugna wants to measure anthropological claims by the revealed truth of Jesus Christ but is, on the other, not reflecting the anthropological dependency of any revelatory experience and thus subsequently the fallibility of Scripture. One is not surprised, therefore, that the implications drawn are more or less reconsiderations and interpretations of scriptural texts and liturgical practices. Thus LaCugna ends her study 'by reflecting on the life of communion preached by Jesus Christ and undertaken by his followers in baptism.'[41] This leads her to some questionable implications. One example might suffice at this point when she writes: 'The theoretical perspective opened out by the doctrine of the Trinity, therefore, was not simply theoretical but also political: the primacy of communion among equals, not the primacy of one over another, is the hallmark of the reign of the God of Jesus Christ.'[42] But how do we shape this communion, if 'God's *arche* is the shared rule of equal persons'?[43] This answer still remains open. In my opinion, it is not adequate when she writes in regard of ecclesial life: 'The doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that in God there is neither hierarchy nor inequality, neither division nor competition, but only unity in love amid diversity. The Christian community is the image or icon of the invisible God when its communitarian life mirrors the inclusivity of divine love.'[44] In this context, too little reflection is offered on the notions of hierarchy, division, competition and the significance of responsibility from the angle of human experience. One might well ask LaCugna if she can imagine a human community without hierarchy, divisions and competitions – and at this point I am not asking the question why these concepts only seem to be conceived in a negative way. But if these concepts are part of our human condition, then it is questionable what shall be made of such an analogy that the Christian community as the image of God should actually be a community, which it cannot possibly be, namely a communion without hierarchy, division and competition.

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[40] Ibid., 292-3.
[41] Ibid., 382.
[42] Ibid., 391.
[43] Ibid., 394.
[44] Ibid., 403.

In sum, although she emphasises the importance of the reconception of the doctrine of God from a trinitarian perspective, LaCugna is not able to enhance our understanding of human life in connection with politics, ethics and ecclesiology in the way she promised to do. This is most likely due to a blurred distinction between *theologia* and *oikonomia*.[45] There is a confusion in the conceptions of revelation, scripture and human experience where she leaves us in amazement as to where and how she ultimately anchors her strong conviction of an objective and normative view of the divine personhood in the face of Christ. Thereby she neglects vital insights of human experience, which are indispensable for the elaboration of practical implications for human life.

1.2.3 Gunton: Perichoresis and conceptual captivity

Colin Gunton is a theologian who tries to structure his whole theological enterprise from a trinitarian perspective. Gunton is convinced that from a trinitarian point of view everything looks different. 'Theology ... is the enterprise of thought which seeks to express conceptually and as well as possible both the being of God and the implications of that being for human existence on earth.'[46] Subsequently trinitarian theology has to fulfil two tasks, first, to help Christians to express their faith in God in a more appropriate and intelligible way and, second, explain the content and the meaning of the Christian faith to people who are outside the Church. Accordingly Gunton seeks with his enterprise to find a way out of some of the dead ends of antiquity and of modern times and to search for new and inspiring ways to regain a theological understanding of God, humanity and creation in a post-modern world. It is precisely at this point where the modern battle between theology, philosophy and modern science takes place. It is here where the modern critique of Christianity takes its starting point and Christianity is challenged to respond and give answers to the question how human beings might live in the modern world despite their experience of suffering and evil. Despite its knowledge of being encompassed by a vast universe, theology can still speak in a responsible and

[45] 'Many of those who understand the subtlety of LaCugna's terminological innovation nevertheless remain concerned that the LaCugna corollary collapses God into the economy of salvation ... blurring the distinction between Creator and creature...': Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, 160.

[46] Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 7. Hereafter: [*Promise*].

intelligible way about this universe as creation, about the cross event as salvation and about the human being as being created in God's image.[47]

In agreement with Moltmann and LaCugna, Gunton is clear about the fact that trinitarian theology, not neglecting biblical revelation, must go back behind the failures and one-sided developments within the doctrine of God and regain the strength of the Greek Fathers in language and theology. Consequently, the vital insight for him is that God is a Being-in-communion. In line with the Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas he can argue, that '[t]he substance of God, "God", has no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion.'[48] This statement emphasises that the theology of the Cappadocians rightly observed that God could not be pressed into the conception of a mathematical "one", but rather has to be conceived as a continuous and indivisible community.[49] The concept of perichoresis thus gains great significance, a concept which originally expressed - in agreement with the Nicene Creed and the theology of the Greek Fathers - the mutual dependency and inter-relatedness of the three divine persons. The notion "perichoresis" expressed that what one particular divine person is, it is only through its relation to the other two, so that ultimately for the understanding of God neither the number "one" and thus the *monas*, nor the plural "three" could claim priority. In this way the concept of perichoresis describes the unity of God as an interpenetrating plurality of the three divine persons. The importance of the concept of perichoresis lies in its safeguarding function in preventing theology from falling off to one or other side of the balance, leading either to a strict monotheism (with the result of subordinationism) or to tritheism. Perichoresis supports and conveys the understanding that the three persons of the Trinity only exist eternally in mutual interdependency and interrelatedness. 'The three do not merely coinhere, but dynamically constitute one another's being', they exist in 'reciprocal eternal relatedness.'[50]

Due to his conceptual starting point and his dialogue with traditional theology and modern philosophy Gunton's implications remain to a large degree on a theoretical and conceptual level.[51] Writing about the human creation as reflecting the image of God, for instance, he concludes after developing a trinitarian framework: 'To be a person is to be

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[47] *Promise*, 26-9.
[48] *Promise*, 9.
[49] *Promise*, 10.
[50] Gunton, *The One*, 164. For a critique, Fermer, 'The Limits of Trinitarian Theology as a Methodological Paradigm', *op. cit.*
[51] This is also due to Gunton's overall ambition to develop "open transcendentals" as marks of being grounded in the concept of relationality. See especially his sections on the problem of substantiality and the particular: *The One*, 188-204.

constituted in particularity and freedom – to be given space to be – by others in community. *Otherness* and *relation* continue to be the two central and polar concepts here.'[52] And in context with the non-personal world, he comments: '[B]eing in the image of God has something to do with the human responsibility to offer the creation, perfected, back to its creator as a perfect sacrifice of praise. It is here that are to be found the elements of truth in the claims that the image of God is to be found in the human stewardship of the creation.'[53] These implications are surely important as theological statements but they still remain very abstract and are in need of a more concrete and relevant completion.

Similar observations can be made when Gunton wants to 'move toward an ecclesiology of perichoresis: in which there is no permanent structure of subordination' but rather the space for 'overlapping patterns of relationships.'[54] It is precisely at this point where it becomes clear that Gunton pays too little attention, if at all, to the significance of experience in doing theology. Approaches that try to integrate, for example, human suffering – and at this point Gunton obviously has Moltmann in mind as a writer in the Hegelian tradition – are too easily branded as projectionist. Gunton explains: 'Their chief defect is that they turn Christ into a world principle at the expense of Jesus of Nazareth, and often construe his cross a focus for the suffering of God rather than as the centre of that history in which God overcomes sin and evil. That is to say, the doctrine of the Trinity must not be abstracted from the doctrine of the atonement.'[55] Here we can observe that a conceptual framework is more important to him than the need to deal with human experience as the ground for the elaboration of conceptual or doctrinal frameworks. Gunton seems to marginalize the human person of Jesus as the incarnate God, regarding the doctrines of atonement and salvation as the proper point of departure for dealing with the significance of Jesus Christ. He is already presupposing a certain doctrinal interpretation of the cross. But from the perspective of human experience, the cross *is* a culmination point of suffering and people who do suffer find it very helpful to meditate upon Jesus on the cross as the suffering God. It appears paradoxical that Gunton criticises Moltmann who is really concerned about the suffering Jesus of Nazareth as a human being and as the Son of God for using trinitarian categories 'in order to discern the work of the divine Spirit largely or chiefly from

[52] *Promise*, 114.
[53] *Promise*, 115.
[54] *Promise*, 80.
[55] *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Toward a fully Trinitarian Theology* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2003), 25.

immanent patterns of modern history and social development.'[56] Christ is not at all turned into a world principle in Moltmann at the expense of Jesus of Nazareth, but rather Jesus of Nazareth as a human person is his point of departure. One feels inclined to ask Gunton from where he draws his analogies discerning the work of the divine Spirit and the significance of Jesus' death if the possibility of the immanent patterns of history seems to be ruled out. Gunton himself seems to be inconsistent precisely at this point when he states, that 'it remains the case that any identification of God apart from Jesus of Nazareth is in danger of becoming an abstraction,' and that 'we must place ourselves theologically where the action is, because if we turn away from God's actual historical self-identification in Jesus, we simply manufacture an idol, or a series of idols.'[57] But his Jesus of Nazareth and his understanding of God's 'action' appear to be identical with the doctrine of atonement and not with the life of Jesus as a human being. Gunton's whole approach is in danger of abstraction! Furthermore, what about the Old Testament images of God, what about the narratives which convey many theological depictions of how and who God is? Are they simply idolatrous because they do not stand on Gunton's conceptual presuppositions? However that may be, what does become obvious is that the centrality of Jesus of Nazareth is for Gunton a conceptual one and the emphasis on the notion of God's action is conceived in terms of the doctrines of creation, redemption (atonement) and consummation. Not surprisingly, notions such as fear, suffering, power or the search for meaning, which are vital concepts for human persons in their everyday struggle with life, hardly turn up at all in his exploration of the concepts of personhood, relatedness and otherness.

In conclusion then and without denying the promise of trinitarian theology, one has to be clear about the underlying conditions and presuppositions one makes in order to apply the concepts of relationality and communion to the doctrine of God and subsequently to anthropology or ecclesiology.[58] To put the matter in more general terms, a mere substitution of an ontology of being with an ontology of communion just will not do. First, there is the problem of direct analogy which conceives the divine persons in the same way as we understand human persons and, second, it is too easily assumed that putting sociality over individualism solves the problem of domination and

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[56] Ibid., 25.
[57] Ibid., 26.
[58] Similar problems occur especially in concepts of the Trinity which use relationality as an ontological category and speak of God as relationality: Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993); Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1994); David Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

hierarchy.[59] Instead of a proper relational approach this often seems to me more like giving the notion of the Three priority over the One. Finally, the weight put on the notion of communion is gained without any deep encounter with human experience. Doctrinal and philosophical reflections come first, neglecting to a large degree the fact that human experience plays epistemologically a vital role in our perception of relationality, communion and personhood. Regarding this, it is not surprising that the conclusions drawn do not yet illustrate adequately the promised implications for human life.

1.3 THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE CHURCH AND HUMAN EXPERIENCE

1.3.1 Inadequate correlation between theology and ministry

Despite all the new and helpful conceptions which so many theologians over the last thirty years have elaborated in giving the doctrine of the Trinity their full attention, one is still left uneasy when searching for the promising and challenging implications for Christian life. Many of the contemporary trinitarian studies stay within the realm of dogmatic theology trying to reform the traditional formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity. Probably as a result of this main theological thrust, theologians who try to depict implications are too readily applying their kind of communitarian pre-understanding to society or the Church. Moltmann, as we have already noticed above, seems to ground his trinitarian implications too simply on a critique of political and clerical monotheism, which suggests that a communitarian view is the answer to oppression. LaCugna, in a similar way, under the headline of "Living Trinitarian Faith", grounds her implications on the conclusion: '*Entering into the life of God means entering in the deepest way possible into the economy, into the life of Jesus Christ, into the life of the Spirit, into the life of others ... Entering into divine life therefore is impossible unless we also enter into a life of love and communion with others.*'[60] Again, the key word "communion" seems to be the answer for a new revival of the Church and for overcoming hierarchical and oppressive structures. This is not to say that I do not appreciate what Moltmann and LaCugna try to do. But a substitution of an ontology of being by an ontology of communion (emphasising the notions of love, freedom and dialogue) does not automatically change the nature of a human communion as long as

[59] Cf. Bauckham, 'Jürgen Moltmann's *The Trinity*', *op. cit.*
[60] *God for Us*, 382. [Italics original.]

the inherent problems of any human community - posed by the concepts of rule, structure, power and inter-dependence – are not adequately addressed and dealt with.

From another perspective, this "uneasy-ness" is also rooted in the observation that the ordinary Christian in the local church is more or less indifferent to the doctrine of the Trinity. If one looks towards developments within church bodies and is attentive to discussions about "how we should fulfil our mission as the people of God", then there is often more attention paid to propositions derived from social management than from theology. Has this something to do with a gap between theology and ministry? Theology seems to be responsible for elaborating Christian doctrines which build the ground for ecclesial confessions and liturgy, but once it comes to so called "practical questions", about ministry and subsequently how to structure churches, how to deal with offices, financial problems or how to counsel people, one is inclined to surmise that much more reliance is put on sociological, economical and psychological insights. Even within universities and seminaries, there still seems to be a gap between systematic theology and practical theology. Yet the former, concerned with Christian doctrine, is seen as the core of theology, while the latter, concerned with ministry, pastoral care and homiletics, is subordinated as an appendix to theology, where one only has to apply theological insights.

But doing theology has everything to do with asking the right questions. The outcome of an investigation depends to a large degree on the questions that the investigator poses and engages with. But how can theology ask the right questions, if it does not engage in a mutual dialogue with Christians at the local base of the Church or at least with practical theology? Looking at contemporary trinitarian theology and the promising statement of radical consequences for Christian life, one is compelled to conclude that the wrong questions are being put forward. If the Trinity 'is not regarded as one doctrine among others in the doctrinal scheme of Christian dogmatics', but 'is seen as determining the systematic structure of Christian dogmatics and its content in all its parts', and 'radically affects the exposition of who is the God in whom Christians believe, and the presentation of what can be asserted about God's being and the God-world relationship,'[61] one is surprised why trinitarian theology has not really affected, changed or reformed the life of the Church. Are the questions posed and then answered by theologians engaged in trinitarian theology questions within a philosophical-theological realm that are not correlated with modern human experience and life? Is the

[61] C. Schwöbel, 'Introduction', in C. Schwöbel and C. Gunton (eds.), *Persons, Divine and Human* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 10.

theological enterprise still a one-way street, where the theologian, out of his philosophical reflections, offers the ordinary Christian his or her advice and knowledge?[62]

If there lies any truth in these observations, even just a little, then this would entail that the realms of theological enterprise and the basic experiences of Christians are not properly linked. There is an un-bridged gap between philosophical theology and grass root theology, between the academic sphere and human life. The consequence of such a gap is necessarily the subordination of basic human experience to systematic theology, and thus a subordination of faith-grounded experience to doctrine and philosophical investigation. One starts to wonder whether theology is really a function of faith and of human life, given in order to understand our relatedness to God and the human other, or whether it is rather a function of the Church with its agreed doctrines. This leads to some more fundamental questions.

1.3.2 Inadequate correlation between Church and faith

Wilfried Härle starts the exposition of his *Dogmatik* with the definition: 'Theology is a function of faith. Christian theology therefore is a function of the Christian faith.'[63] This statement, which might seem rather simple and for some people maybe too self-evident even to mention, can help shed light on some of the contemporary problems within trinitarian theology, problems which are grounded in the presupposition of a theologian's work. In saying this I have particularly in mind Karl Barth's dictum for his *Church Dogmatics*: 'Dogmatics is a theological discipline. But theology is a function of the Church.'[64] This definition is not opposed to the one Härle uses but, nevertheless, it is not identical with the former. The term *Church* implies the social community of believers and, moreover, since we live in a divided Christianity with many denominations, the term Church becomes even more problematic in the sense that it is easily equated with one's own Church. But the necessity for doing theology does not arise in the first place out of the emergence of a particular community. The reality of faith in a person's life is the primary cause for doing theology, because it is God's own

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[62] For an account of the importance of religious language and experience and how they relate to theological discourse, Jeff Astley, *Exploring God-talk: Using Language in Religion* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004).

[63] Wilfried Härle, *Dogmatik* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 10. [My translation.]

[64] *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 3. See also Barth's ambiguous reference to science in his *Dogmatics in Outline* (SCM Press, 2001), 1-6.

claim on this person's life in which theological reflection is based. The presupposition "theology as a function of the Church" immediately entails ecclesiology and therefore tends to give the group of believers the primary place in the reflection of faith. Of course, we always find ourselves standing within the community of believers; there is no point *outside* of an already existing community of believers and thus there is no isolated and independent "I". But there is a difference between saying "I am indissolubly embedded in relations" and assuming that "communion is primary to person". The latter easily deprives persons of their ultimate uniqueness and God-given particularity. Therefore, to state that theology is a function of faith highlights the essential insight that all theological reflection must ultimately be faithful to God rather than depending on doctrines and being faithful to the Church.[65] The community of believers has to be aware and take seriously the fact that God's reality in each person's life is the starting point for doing theology in its most fundamental meaning.[66] Truth, although we cannot do without social structures, does not ultimately and necessarily depend upon majorities.

This is important to notice because throughout the Church's history, theology was and still is in danger of becoming and being mainly a vehicle of the Church, which is probably most obvious in Catholic or Orthodox tradition, but I would argue that this is the case for many Protestant churches also in following Barth's definition of theology as a function of the Church. When theology becomes subordinate to ecclesiology, or to put it in words more appropriate with trinitarian language, when *person* becomes subordinate to *community*, it dilutes its critical strength and is in danger of forgetting its primary task of reflecting Christian faith and life in order to assist the Christian on his or her journey with God. When loosing the sensibility of this distinction, how can the Church remain an *ecclesia semper reformanda*? An ontology of communion transferred to the Church, as the Body of Christ, easily becomes a means of obscuring power and authority. To this problem I will turn in the next section.

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[65] Cf. Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 1-4.

[66] 'Theologie aber ist eine Aufgabe aller Christen. Ich glaube an ein allgemeines Theologentum aller Gläubigen, ihrem allgemeinen Priestertum entsprechend': Moltmann, *Die Quelle des Lebens. Der Heilige Geist und die Theologie des Lebens* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1997), 9.

1.3.3 Ecclesiological captivity

These assumptions seem to find some support from observations drawn from contemporary trinitarian theological discourse. Let us go back to LaCugna's statement. The remark that *the doctrine* of the Trinity is ultimately a practical doctrine is obviously a first hint why radical consequences have not yet been drawn, because for most theologians *the doctrine itself* - as delivered by the Fathers with all their philosophical presuppositions, their engagement in substance metaphysics, the dualism of body and soul or the sharp distinction of the finite and the infinite - is the starting point and centre of investigation. But one may question whether, after the philosophical and anthropological turn to relationality,[67] this is still a reasonable starting point for developing a new understanding of the triune being of God? This attempt may lead to a new understanding of tradition but does it lead to a reformation of theology and thus to challenging implications for human life?

Although so much is said about the fact that Greek philosophy prevailed over theology in shaping many of our Christian doctrines, and that a strict Christian monotheism subdued the notion of God's 'being-in-communion' and in virtue of that had devastating consequences for Church and society, one is really puzzled that this whole discussion of the Trinity and its implications for Christian life seems to be only a topic on the academic agenda for theologians concerned with Christian doctrine. Even more perplexing is the fact that though most of the concepts are based on God as a being-in-communion, on the notion of *perichoresis* and therefore on personhood and relationship as two main categories for the perception of God and for an analogy for human life in the image of God, most theologians have no problem in integrating their newly perceived views into the existing mainline ecclesiology of their denomination.[68] Are our theological investigations subdued to the prevailing doctrines and powers within the church?

Let us briefly look back at the beginnings of Christianity. A first pointer toward ecclesiological captivity can already be found within the developments of the early Church. As far as I can see, although the Fathers engaged very deeply in shaping the doctrine of the Trinity, they obviously had no problems in juxtaposing the doctrine of

[67] For a discussion of the turn to relationality see below Chapter Three.
[68] Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Burns and Oates: Search Press, 1988); John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985); William Hill, *The Three-Personed God*, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982).

the Trinity and the emperor made so by God's grace. Here we can observe that the elaboration of the doctrine of the Trinity did not really necessitate salient implications for ecclesiology and Christian life. This is not surprising considering the fact that the growing Church - organizing, structuring and creating its life and practices in confrontation with Jewish groups and in opposition to heretics - developed and shaped its ecclesiology long before the doctrine of the Trinity was a proper matter of concern. Moreover, ecclesiological convictions and the structuring of ecclesial sociality initially were derived from Scripture, which obviously contains many monarchical and hierarchical images and some detailed household codes.

By contrast and as a relatively late development, the teaching about the Trinity, deeply embedded in apologetic disputes, emerged out of doctrinal and philosophical concerns as a means of safeguarding the divinity of Jesus and an appropriate understanding of salvation. Trinitarian language functioned as a tool for the doctrinal explication of the doctrine of God trying to make sense of the Christian confession of Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Thus the shaping of ecclesial communion and the trinitarian doctrine of God did not necessarily correlate with one another. This initial disconnectedness was further supported through the emphasis in St. Augustine's theology in which the formula *una substantia – tres personae* was central precisely because talk about God as the one substance became the prevailing approach in the enterprise of developing a doctrine of God.[69] The notion of God's perichoretic being and his communitarian nature did not gain sufficient weight capable of influencing and challenging other realms of theology. Miroslav Volf thus states in his study on the matter quite plainly and soberly that one should not overestimate the influence of trinitarian thought on political or ecclesiological realities.[70] It appears to be the case that the view of a preceding ecclesiological givenness (prior to all doctrinal development), in the body of Christ, with already existing beliefs was seen as the main foundation and starting point for any theological enterprise.

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[69] See LaCugna, *God for Us*, 101; Moltmann, *Trinität*, 32.

[70] 'One should not, however, *overestimate* the influence of trinitarian thinking on political and ecclesial reality. Thus, for example, the bishops of the fifth century apparently sensed no contradiction between an affirmation of trinitarian faith and the sacralization of the emperor': *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 194.

What shall be made of contemporary assumptions, for example, when John Zizioulas puts his Orthodox conviction first before he even starts his theological investigations?[71]

> The Church is not simply an institution. She is a "mode of existence," *a way of being.* The mystery of the Church, even in its institutional dimension, is deeply bound to the being of man, to the being of the world and to the very being of God. In virtue of this bond, so characteristic of patristic thought, ecclesiology assumes marked importance, not only for all aspects of theology, but also the existential needs of man in every age.[72]

And what about the Catholic conviction stated by Vatican II in the decree on ecumenism that only through the Roman Catholic Church has one full access to salvation?[73]

In saying this, my point is to argue that we cannot easily and in an immediate way deduce political or ecclesiological concepts from the doctrine of the Trinity, just because the notion of "communion" seems to be a central one. Of course - and Moltmann at this point is surely too superficial in his opinion when he says, that a unity model entails oppressive dominance structures[74] - the notion of community does not automatically answer the question of power and authority, because, as David Brown rightly observes, a community of persons, for instance three-man juntas, can also be oppressive and act in a manner not distinct at all from a monarch or if one wants to put it more negatively, from a dictator.[75] But if our understanding of God is and always must be the foundation for doctrinal development and thus the starting point for elaborating an ecclesiology or other implications for our comprehension of human life and reality, does this not imply a change of priority or at least the search for a more appropriate balance between the doctrine of God and ecclesiological convictions? My conclusion then is that the development of the doctrine of the Trinity and its current revitalization has not necessarily entailed a revision or a re-thinking of basic ecclesiological assumptions and other realms of human social life.

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[71] Volf (*After Our Likeness*, chapter 5) and Gunton (*Promise*, 60) criticise Zizioulas for being incoherent in his ecclesiological inferences.

[72] *Being as Communion*, 15. Cf. P. Fox, *God as Communion*, 219.

[73] 'Denn nur durch die katholische Kirche Christi, die das allgemeine Hilfsmittel des Heils ist, kann man Zutritt zu der ganzen Fülle der Heilsmittel haben': K. Rahner und H. Vorgrimler, *Kleines Konzilskompendium. Sämtliche Texte des Zweiten Vatikanums* (Freiburg: Herder, 1996), 233.

[74] Moltmann, *Trinität*, 208-17.

[75] David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 308.

1.3.4 Metaphysical captivity

This leads to another observation. Contemporary trinitarian theology seems to be still a captive of metaphysics. This is not to deny that philosophical, sophisticated and intelligible reflection is important for doing theology – far from it. But there is a difference between reflecting our understanding of God and human personhood and communion in the light of human thought, knowledge, and culture and, as it still seems to be in contemporary trinitarian theology, in the light of Greek and medieval philosophical systems and presuppositions. Thus the starting point for many theologians still is a doctrinal exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity, a historical survey of Greek and Hebrew thought, or a modern concept of theism and atheism. The questions asked are mainly questions from tradition or from philosophical discourse and thus theologians still feel urged to reconcile the philosophical question of the One and the Many in search for the Absolute. As a result, the main basis for the exposition of the concept of personhood in trinitarian thought still adheres to a large extent to a dialogue with substance metaphysics. Modern trinitarian theology, it seems to me, engages in highly sophisticated, philosophical discussions in which the ongoing discourse is again and overall a battle on philosophical grounds and presuppositions as it tries to untangle the web of a hybrid deity.[76] That ongoing attempt at finding the best philosophical framework for understanding the Trinity as such, even as persons-in-communion, easily reduces to a search for the *absolute* and consequently for authority. Zizioulas, for example, ultimately substitutes an *ontology of being* based on the notion of substance with an *ontology of communion* based on the concept of person. Despite all his salient work in enhancing our apprehension of God as personal, as a being-in-communion rather than as an absolute substance, he uses his ontology of communion as a new *absolute* for God's being. This serves him not just as an analogy between God and the Church, but also as a prop for the authority of ecclesial communion. Here the observer cannot fail to notice that it is rather the unquestioned assumption of the divine givenness of the existent ecclesial communion which determines his discourse on the doctrine of the Trinity. Consequently Zizioulas' trinitarian insights do not at all critique the ecclesial being but rather explain and justify things the way they are. The reader is left with the enigma how one can elaborate an ontology of communion, and a concept of perichoresis, of persons in mutual relationship, without mentioning the notion of power

[76] Cf. Hill, *The Three-Personed-God*; Boff, *Trinity and Society*; Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

and authority, and consequently not alluding to deep seated problems within the Church itself, as for example male dominance and the supremacy of clergy.

At this point it is worthwhile noticing that the traditional notion of "mystery" still plays an important role in trinitarian theology. To speak of the *mystery of God* is correct in so far as it is applied to the notion of God's ineffability, that God and the conception of the Trinity ultimately always transcends our understanding and goes beyond our knowledge. But if the concept of mystery is used in a derived sense, for instance, in *the mystery of faith* or *the mystery of the Church*, it is easily assumed that God's absolute essence, in one way or another, lives on in the believer or in the community of the Church as something that *we possess*. Very often pneumatology is the justification for confusing *God as Spirit* with *we are in the Spirit*, and the *mystery of God as Spirit* suddenly becomes the *mystery of us* ***having*** *the Spirit*, with the ecclesiological consequence of a substantial equation between Christ and the body of the church.[77] Consequently one has to be very careful that all this does not become an obfuscating concept and thus a means of keeping the *status quo*, and so ultimately a vehicle of power and authority in the hands of the powers that be.

1.3.5 The neglect of biblical experience

A further weakness seems to be a lack of proper integration of biblical experience. It is fascinating to observe that biblical texts to a large degree only function as a proof for the necessity of the doctrine of the Trinity as 'biblical'. William Hill in his *The Three-Personed God* starts his investigation with a biblical survey in order to show that the Trinity is already 'present' in the Bible, what he calls the "New Testament Matrix of the Trinity". But once this is said and the doctrine of the Trinity subsequently endorsed as "biblical", the Bible thereafter does not play an important role any more. In a similar way this is true of Robert Jenson's work *The Triune Identity* where he begins with a biblical investigation of the name of God. He then concludes: '"Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" is appropriate to name the gospel's God because the phrase immediately summarizes the primal Christian interpretation of God.'[78] After that, the following discourse is based on traditional doctrinal and philosophical grounds. Scripture appears

[77] Cf. Zizioulas' position: 'All separation between Christology and ecclesiology vanishes in the Spirit. ... So we can say without risk of exaggeration that Christ exists only pneumatologically, whether in His distinct personal particularity or in His capacity as the body of the Church and the recapitulation of all things': *Being as Communion,* 111.

[78] *The Triune Identity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 18.

to be a mere jumping board or launching pad to ground the discourse in biblical revelation, but subsequently trinitarian reflection is dominated by metaphysics and the search for ontologies.

In his book *Act and Being* Colin Gunton speaks very challengingly of the pitfalls of theological tradition that neglects revelation as the source of our knowability of God. In this work, mainly concerned with the divine attributes, he claims that the Christian doctrine of God's names, perfections and characteristics was built, in the first instance, on Greek philosophical presuppositions about God's being. Although he insists quite strongly, and I would fully agree with him, that in Christian theology 'the Old Testament was effectively displaced by Greek philosophy as the theological basis of the doctrine of God, certainly so far as the doctrine of the divine attributes is concerned,'[79] he does not aim for a "biblical way" of integrating the Old Testament into his enterprise. Even though he claims the inherent problem of the doctrine of God lies in the divine attributes, which is, quoting Schwöbel, 'the antinomy between the conceptions of the divine attributes in philosophical theology and discourse about divine action in Christian faith,'[80] he is not able to integrate Hebrew thought. He criticises the tradition. Yet while he makes some good proposals for how we can speak about and use God's attributes in a more adequate way, he still sticks to the traditional discourse in that he discusses the attributes found in tradition. This is because the fundamental statement that 'God's being is known in and through his action, his triune act,'[81] is, throughout our theological language, always seen through the lenses of the doctrines of creation, redemption and consummation. In other words: When we talk about God's actions, we talk about abstract theological conceptions but not about the stories we find in Scripture.

However, when Hebrews talk about divine actions, they tell stories. They talk from the depths of human experience; they open up their souls, because their 'God-walk' is shaping their 'God-talk.'[82] There seems to be a gap, which we do not face seriously enough, because we still tend to overrule biblical-story-language with philosophical-logical-language, or because we assume that our theological doctrines when we speak of creation, redemption and consummation are identical with God's

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[79] *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 3.
[80] Ibid., 21-2.
[81] Ibid., 113.
[82] The double expression "*God-walk* and *God-talk*" I owe to Frederick Herzog which I came across through the reading of *Theology from the Belly of the Whale: A Frederick Herzog Reader*, ed. Joerg Rieger (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999).

action in his revelation. Over and over again we come across the assertion that "God's being is known in and through his action." But if revelation history is the primary source of our understanding of God, where is the promised encounter with biblical theology? It seems to me that modern trinitarian theology engages in highly sophisticated, philosophical discussions in which the ongoing discourse is again and overall a battle on philosophical grounds and presuppositions.[83] Furthermore, though far from insisting that we should negate the importance of philosophical language, it is questionable why abstract language should be treated as more adequate, more truthful, and more appropriate than the narrative language by which people express their theological experience. The above-mentioned antinomy between philosophical theology and discourse about divine action in Christian faith seems always be dissolved in favour of the former.

1.3.6 The neglect of anthropology

Earlier on, we observed that a metaphysical captivity still rules in theology. The search for systems and ontologies appears as a stumbling block for concrete implications because human life does not revolve around theories about essence, substance or ontologies of community and personhood, but around the notion of life, with all its struggle for surviving, overcoming fear, and striving for meaning. Although the conception of God as being-in-communion offers various fields of interpretation and analogies for human life, the discourse still is to a large degree a purely philosophical one.[84] One reason for this can be found in a false dichotomy between theology and anthropology, an observation which finds support in Douglas Davies' recent comment, that systematic theologians 'are reluctant to admit anthropological notions into their

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[83] Cf. Alan Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996). Torrance exhaustively examines the manner in which language functions in the context of trinitarian descriptions without, although engaging with Wittgenstein, paying proper attention to the "*Lebensformen*", that is human experience and life as it is lived. Consequently he invokes a doxological model and speaks of semantic participation in the Trinity.

[84] Cf. Steven Holmes, 'Trinitarian Missiology: Towards a Theology of God as Missionary', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8 (2006), 72-90. Holmes has developed an interesting trinitarian missiology based on the doctrine of the divine missions, which allows him to say that God is properly described as missionary. 'Purposeful, self-sacrificial acts of loving concern flowing from the Father through the Son and Spirit to the world God has created are fundamental images of who God is, from all eternity' (p.88). But what then should a missionary church look like in the image of God? His answer is: 'Just as purposeful, cruciform, self-sacrificial sending is intrinsic to God's own life, being sent in a cruciform, purposeful, self-sacrificial way must be intrinsic to the church being the church' (p.89). These implications are surely important as theological statements but they still remain very abstract and are in need of a more concrete and relevant completion.

studies, and have tended to have philosophy as their dialogue-partner.'[85] These two terms still wait for reconciliation. I wonder if this dichotomy is closely connected with the treatment of theology as a function of the Church rather than of faith. The Church seems to be the warrant for theology, while "faith", understood as the subjective understanding of a single person's belief, is closely connected with anthropology. Certainly, it seems that many theologians are suspicious of anthropology, which is one reason why the integration of human experience seems to be hardly possible, an integration which is overdue in trinitarian theology.

This dichotomy between theology and anthropology seems to be based on another ambiguity and ambivalence, namely freedom and necessity and in a Barthian manner, a sharp distinction between Creator and creature, between God and human. It is very illuminating to study the reactions of some theologians to Pannenberg's work, where Pannenberg is branded as being an 'anthropologist' while the other side feels urged to safeguard 'theology', putting on the role of the defender of God's aseity and freedom. One feels inclined to parallel this discussion to the book of Job. John Thompson, for example, in a critique of Pannenberg's theology,[86] is not able to sense the embeddedness of human beings in history and creatureliness in a way that all our God-talk is provisional and we have to distinguish this condition from the doxological creed that Christ is the truth. It is interesting how he reacts to Pannenberg's struggle, for instance, with religious dialogue: 'There may be "truths" and "lights" in the world that God uses to make himself known especially in other religions than the Christian. But such truths and lights are to be measured by the one truth and light of God in Jesus Christ rather than being seen as contributory phases necessarily leading to its fullness.'[87] I will not go into detail, but what one can sense here, is a certain type of fear, due to a confusion of two distinct things. It is one thing to confess and say that Christ is God-Son and thus ultimate truth and fullness. But it is something else to say, that we are able to measure the truths of other people. Of course we have to, if we take dialogue seriously, but always as an open process, where the other could contribute an insight, which enhances our understanding of God and Christ. All we have is limited knowledge; even the words of Jesus are embedded in the human condition and depend on human interpretation. Thus, to acknowledge that non-Christians can contribute to my knowledge of God and thus help to understand God more fully is not in contradiction

[85] *Anthropology and Theology* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 2.
[86] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).
[87] John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 138.

with the fullness of Christ. A similar objection we find in one of Christoph Schwöbel's essays, when he concludes, that 'the relationship of theological anthropology to non-theological anthropologies should not so much be seen in terms of a possible (theological) synthesis, but in terms of a dialogue.'[88] And he comments in a footnote that this indicates his 'criticism of Pannenberg's attempt to provide a foundation for Christian anthropology in general anthropological studies.'[89] Again, one is surprised how Schwöbel is able to separate these two realms so clearly, if he wants to draw conclusions that are reasonable for human reason and knowledge not just within the realm of the Church. Certainly, we must distinguish the two realms because we cannot subsume the non-theological anthropologist under the Christian roof. While theology assumes that God exists and underlies religious experience, anthropology tends to assume that God does not exist and thus simply studies the reported experiences of people.[90] But the relational interdependency forbids us to put one theoretically over the other, as if concepts from a non-theological anthropologist would automatically be opposed to theological concepts. If statements about the human condition are true, they ultimately have to be true for theologians and anthropologists. Of course, and Pannenberg himself is conscious of this peril, one has to be careful not to be occupied just with reported human experience, neglecting God's unconditioned work through the Holy Spirit. But this in no way weakens Pannenberg's argument, that, if theology does not want to deceive itself, it must engage from the very start in reflections on the fundamental significance of anthropology for modern thought and the perception of human and religious experience if it wants to confer relevance and universal validity upon theological claims concerning the human condition.[91]

Anthropology might seem to threaten God-talk as proper God-talk, as if there could be such a thing as pure theology at all. This assumption somehow, however, obscures the fundamental insight that all God-talk is 'anthropological theology'. This is not to say that theology is dissolved in human anthropology, as if there would be such a thing as human anthropology isolated from theological anthropology and vice versa, but it is to argue that there is for us no point where we can step outside of our human createdness. When revelation is understood as God's dialogue with human beings, his

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[88] C. Schwöbel, 'Human Being as Relational Being', in C. Schwöbel and C. Gunton (eds.), *Persons, Divine and Human* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 145.
[89] Ibid., footnote 7.
[90] Davies, *Anthropology and Theology*, 1.
[91] Pannenberg, *Anthropologie in theologischer Perspektive* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 15-6.

presence in my life and in the world, then I live and think automatically under this condition. My experiences and my knowledge are conditioned by faith. This means, I acknowledge the reality of God and his presence in the world and I acknowledge that God communicates with human beings in whatsoever way is appropriate. I acknowledge that there are words and knowledge which are not just human words, but which we know and can only know because God reveals himself. At the same time, faith, and subsequently all revealed knowledge, is inescapably embedded in created time and space. Knowledge of God, expressions of divine attributes, and all speech about God depends on the human condition. Consequently, although I believe that God's Word is not identical with human words and knowledge, it is always expressed through human words, which depend on historicity, culture, language, and interpretation. There is no way that I can draw a sharp demarcation line between God's Word and human words, experience, and knowledge about God. At this point it is essential to mention Pannenberg's fundamental insight, that even an appeal to inspiration as distinct from revelation, as some theologians wish to do[92], first, does not decide the truth of such experienced inspiration as divine, and second, is always automatically followed and conveyed by interpretation, which is mediated by the context of experience.[93] Everything human people utter theologically falls under the verdict of created limitedness and therefore remains provisional, but simultaneously this God-talk, as a response to God's speaking to us, is always meaningful, because it emerges out of our God-walk. The relationship between revelation and human language thus must be conceived as interpretation, but at the same time we can say that the interpretation of revelation by language is steered by revelation through faith.[94] Thus while theologians like Thompson do seem to have a clear and sharp picture of what Christian revelation concretely means and entails, they succumb to "revelation positivism", which we already find in Barth, and are therefore not able to appreciate anthropology as God's gift and not as a threat.[95] It is here that we envisage the necessity of giving the doctrine of incarnation a higher priority in order to overcome a false

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[92] E.g. W. Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).
[93] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:234.
[94] Cf. E. Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 334-57.
[95] A further example is Paul Molnar's *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2002). Molnar, in dialogue with Karl Barth and contemporary trinitarian theology, wants to develop an immanent doctrine of the Trinity that clarifies divine and human freedom and avoids agnosticism, monism and dualism. He launches a massive neo-Barthian attack against contemporary trinitarian theologians accusing them of not allowing the Word of God revealed to dictate the meaning of theological categories rather than experience. In my view, his understanding of revelation and experience is not tenable.

opposition between theology and anthropology, which is one reason why trinitarian theology has not yet properly appreciated and consequently integrated biblical stories and anthropological insights for describing the relational being of God.

1.4 CONCLUSION

We have looked at contemporary trinitarian theology from two perspectives, first, through the prism of theology and, second, through the prism of Church and human experience. From both angles we came across similar blindspots and weaknesses that find their common link in the neglect of human experience. Drawing all those threads together, let me briefly summarize.

First, while speaking of personhood and communion, we have noticed that the notions of power and authority were neglected. At this point there is further need for discussion if we want to draw conclusions from a communitarian or perichoretic understanding of God for Christian life; otherwise a concept of a social Trinity or of an ontology of communion is most likely to become either a vehicle for one's personal perception of an ideal community or a means of obfuscation in favour of the powers that be.

Second, in relation to the doctrine of revelation, a false dichotomy between theology and anthropology was noted, which inhibited a more fruitful discourse with human experience and insights from the human sciences. Anthropology here is understood in a wide and open sense, indicating all areas of research that contribute to our understanding of what it means to be human - usually carried out by studying the reported experience of people without assuming a theological framework. Especially when using the concepts of communion and personhood for God's being as Trinity, it becomes quite obvious that the demarcation line between theology and anthropology is not as clear as some would wish it to be. Most concepts of human personhood are based on anthropological studies. If we fail to appreciate anthropology as an integral part of doing theology, we will always tend to amalgamate and subsequently confuse our intentions and opinions with God-talk. It should also be noted that this dialectic and interpenetration of anthropology and theology already hugely shaped the Church Fathers' theology. Not only is it the case that their personal experience of salvation in the context of a pagan society and their experience of love and fellowship within their Christian communities played a vital part in shaping theology, but also that their

particular anthropological insights gave their theologies a distinct form. Brian Horne's essay on the correlation of Augustine's *Confessions* and his *De Trinitate* is very illuminating in pointing this out. The *Confessions*, pondering on the significance of human memory and digging into the psychological conditions of being human, he argues, build a backbone for Augustine's theology, and especially for his doctrine of the Trinity. Thus he concludes: 'Decades later, when he came to expound the doctrine of the Trinity the source of his analogies was the anthropology (more precisely the psychology) of this tenth book of the *Confessions*.'[96] This, then, is a good illustration of how human experience and knowledge of the human sciences influence and mould theological interpretation and formulations.[97]

Third, theological approaches to God-talk that are mainly engaged in a dialogue with philosophical concepts of being miss a link to human experience. People do not experience "being" or "substance"; they rather experience life in all its fragmentation, exposed to fear and suffering and the ambiguity of freedom and dependency. People search for meaning in their lives and how they can cope with the human condition. This search does not so much build upon concepts of being and nature, but rather on concepts of life, meaning, fear and particularity. If trinitarian theology wants to draw implications for human life it must engage with this search, pick up the right questions in a dialogue with church ministry and the human sciences and overcome a sometimes obscuring religious positivism (maybe under the notion of mystery or revelation), which always implies an objective starting point from above. Theology is always in danger of forgetting its roots. It has to be a function of the Christian faith rather than of doctrinal expositions and take into account the narratives of religious experience within the Christian community. Theology, therefore, has to assist in reflecting and understanding the correlation between Christian story telling and possible contributions toward a doctrine of God. Theology must not lock itself up in ivory towers but has to seek again and again the dialogue with religious narratives as an original way of God-talk, as an expression of *faith-grounded experience*, which is manifest in Scripture before all doctrinal regulations and in the believer who is in a fundamental sense a theologian.

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[96] Brian L. Horne, 'Persons as Confession: Augustine of Hippo', in C. Schwöbel and C. Gunton (eds.), *Persons, Divine and Human* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 71.

[97] Cf. Edmund Hill's introduction to Augustine's *The Trinity*: 'Augustine had a greedy mind, a voracious intellectual appetite, and what he fed it on was the whole range of his experience, his whole sensual, emotional, rational, and energetic life. This is the field in which he is looking for God': Saint Augustine, *The Trinity* (New York: New City Press, 1991), 20-1.

Fourth, we noted that biblical material more or less functioned as supporting arguments for the justification of the doctrine of the Trinity and the vindication of the Creeds. This is not to suggest that this approach is wrong, but to argue that this should not be the only one. If Scripture is the basic means of God's grace, then it certainly has more to offer in respect of trinitarian God-talk than merely endorsing the propriety of once formulated doctrines. If we are aware of what Gunton states in agreement with Karl Barth, that

> in the incarnation God demonstrates his freedom "to become unlike Himself and yet to remain the same", and it is this revelation of himself which ought to be the source of any conclusion we draw about what he is in eternity. That is the order of knowing: We know God from and in his acts. We know who God is from what he does,[98]

then trinitarian theology has to overcome a one-sided understanding of revelation. If revelation is identified with Christology and subsequent doctrinal formulations, it aggravates the integration of the wider biblical experience (that is the stories of the Old and New Testament) in a more appropriate way and in virtue of that the intensification of trinitarian theology's fecundity.

Fifth and last, we have observed that ecclesiology and a certain kind of doctrinal pre-understanding seems to be the prevalent measure and base for doing trinitarian theology. Due to this, the current discourse within trinitarian theology grounds itself to a large degree on traditional presuppositions by putting the delivered doctrine of the Trinity with its doctrinal formulations at the centre of attention. Subsequently, reforming theology is seen as a linear process, where new theological development is elaborated in accordance with traditional formulations and arguments.

All this, of course, is closely related to a theologian's understanding of doctrine. We might therefore mention the fact that many of the above problems also ground in a certain understanding of doctrinal development in correlation with the concept of revelation. To put it succinctly, those who believe all doctrinal development acknowledged and accredited and sanctioned by the Church not only to be wholly true and without an element of error in it, but also to be an unchangeable necessary process,[99] will certainly not agree with my argumentation. But from my point of view, looking at the historical developments within Scripture itself and within doctrinal development, and conceiving the relationship between revelation and human language as interpretation, though in a particular way steered by revelation through faith, I cannot

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[98] *Act and Being*, 97.

[99] For a critique, Maurice Wiles, *The Making of Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

but assess Scripture and doctrinal development as an interaction of God's Spirit with fallible human beings. This does not at all negate the understanding of Scripture and of doctrines as means of God's grace and as a necessary process for a particular time under particular circumstances, but it does rule out the possible talk of doctrinal development as infallible and as an unchangeable necessary process. Too much was involved in these processes and too many historical reasons shaped the way of doctrinal development to justify the assertion that for the early Church continuity meant building on unchangeable formulations or doctrines. With Maurice Wiles we should rather assume:

> True continuity with the age of the Fathers is to be sought not so much in the repetition of their doctrinal conclusions or even in the building of them, but rather in the continuation of their doctrinal aims. Their doctrinal affirmations were based upon an appeal to the record of Scripture, the activity of worship, and the experience of salvation. Should not true development be seen in the continuation of the attempt to do justice to those three strands of Christian life in the contemporary world?[100]

Trinitarian theology and our understanding of the Trinity, therefore, cannot merely build upon the foundations of Chalcedon, trying to reinterpret old formulations. If continuity is at least partly found in "doctrinal aims", as Wiles put it, in repeating the work of the early Church within our modern framework, then we have to engage much more with modern experience of salvation, read Scripture and doctrines in new ways, looking for more suitable language frameworks and intelligible human experience and thus opening up new possibilities for trinitarian God-talk.

In conclusion then, the survey of this chapter has identified some inconsistencies within contemporary trinitarian theology, highlighting the need for a fresh approach. This conclusion is justified by the observation that trinitarian theology fails to a large degree to draw sufficiently practical implications for human life because of its metaphysical and ecclesiological captivity and its subsequent neglect of general human experience and religious experience as expressed in the biblical narratives. However if trinitarian discourse fails to integrate the language of human life within it and if the Trinity cannot be spoken of in connection with the problems of human sociality, then, it seems to me that LaCugna's conviction is incapable of delivering on its promise that '[t]he doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately a practical doctrine with radical consequences for Christian life.'[101] Any social doctrine of the Trinity emphasizing God's being as a being-in-communion that departs from or neglects human experience is in danger of becoming one-sided and of losing the link to human life as it is actually lived. How then

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[100] *The Making of Christian Doctrine*, 173.
[101] *God for Us*, 1.

must a new approach be structured and pursued if trinitarian theology as academic discourse is not to lose its connection with experience and human life? To answer this question is the main objective of the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

RETRIEVING HUMAN EXPERIENCE FOR A TRINITARIAN HERMENEUTICS

2

RETRIEVING HUMAN EXPERIENCE FOR A TRINITARIAN HERMENEUTICS

2.1 INTRODUCTION: AN INTERSTITIAL METHODOLOGY

Before giving a brief outline of the different parts some preliminary comments in relation to the notion of human experience seem to be requisite, in order to clarify the underlying methodology and structure. Let me begin by drawing attention to the title of this chapter. In choosing the phrase "retrieving human experience for a trinitarian hermeneutics" my aim is to establish what I would like to call an *interstitial methodology*. "Interstitial" is used here because trinitarian theology is in need of recognising its "in-between place" due to an essential dialectic between experience and revelation which underlies its discourse. In this regard two things have to be pointed out. First, it is vital to address the question of how trinitarian theology can and must be done on the basis that all human knowledge and hence linguistic discourse somehow depends on human experience. This emphasis refers to the findings from Chapter One that a one-sided doctrinal and conceptual starting point that neglects a proper investigation of the role human experience plays within theological discourse was found to be unhelpful. From this perspective, the stress on experience tries to hint at both the inappropriateness of indulging in revelatory positivism for theological discourse and the disputability of prioritising the concept over general experience as it is expressed, for instance, in stories. Second, it has to be conceded that Christian theology finds itself already set within a certain kind of trinitarian framework before all questioning and reasoning. This rules out any experiential positivism which seeks to ground theology on a universal and foundationalist notion of experience. This dialectic, however, must not be conceived in oppositional categories. Experience and revelation seem to mutually interrelate with and depend upon one another. The proper place for any theological investigation as linguistic discourse, therefore, is rather somewhere "in-between". Trinitarian theology's abode then displays a kind of interstice, a place where experience and revelation can be distinguished conceptually but not clearly separated on experiential or epistemological grounds. They belong together in such a complex way that I cannot simply start at one point and work my way in a linear fashion down or up

to the other. What does this imply for the purpose of this chapter? Let me briefly spell out some corollaries.

Without abandoning the importance of the notion of revelation, human experience must be considered as the platform on which all human knowledge, including discourse about God, takes place. Theological discourse is linguistic and hence embedded in human experience. If one ventures to claim that trinitarian discourse about God has implications for human life, then this can only be done responsibly if one starts with an investigation of the concepts of experience and language and how they function within the human condition. Only subsequently can the concepts of experience and revelation be distinguished on linguistic grounds without confusion. Admittedly this relationship is a difficult and complex one. Retrieving human experience for theological discourse is not an easy task. Not only is experience itself anything but a simple and uncontested concept, but it also indicates continuing dispute especially in connection with the notion of revelation.[1] This underlines the need to face this problem head on. Given the context of Wittgenstein's account of language and its influence on theology, it becomes imperative, on the one hand, to develop an understanding of experience in relation to language and the notion of truth and, on the other hand, given the theological context of postliberal proposals with their objection against pre-linguistic experience and their full endorsement of a certain kind of cultural-linguistic approach to theology, the crucial task emerges of elaborating a viable notion of revelation that is not doomed to complete silence. For this reason the obligatory task is to give an account of both how theological discourse depends on human experience as the basic condition for all human knowledge and how human experience as not alien to God and his revelatory action is yet able to express and convey knowledge about God. In order to pursue such an investigation it is indispensable to focus not only on the interdependence and interconnectedness between the notions of experience, language, and truth but also on the relationship between revelation and experience. However, since theology undoubtedly is linguistic discourse, any notion of revelation can only be expressed and made intelligible on linguistic grounds. In this sense the concept of experience is primary and hence the elaboration of a new trinitarian hermeneutics must take its point of departure on the side of human experience.

[1] C. Schwöbel rightly summarizes that the concepts of "revelation" and "experience" are often used to identify two dominant fashion trends in theology, in which the theology of revelation and the theology of experience are seen as alternatives and mutually exclusive models: *God: Action and Revelation* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992), 83-6.

This must simultaneously be seen in the light of a second consideration. In contrast to the concept of experience, the notion of revelation includes from a theological perspective the conviction that certain beliefs cannot be conceived as being merely derived from experience because their contents are held to be true at least to some extent as something that has been revealed to human beings by God. This means that theology can only be done from an open "in-between" place where the problem of identifying the relationship between experience and revelation is not yet solved. Concerned with God-talk theologians have no way of leaving this complex and unresolved dialectical structure. Especially in trinitarian discourse they find themselves personally and communally already and always in an "in-between" situation, practicing a belief (worshipping God in Jesus through the Spirit) that is, on the one hand, clearly embedded in experience and linguistic terms and, on the other hand, experienced as not self-produced and transcending the human condition. Anticipating an essential point of the later discussion, it is helpful to note the crucial insight that one can only build an argument if there is something to build on. This means that there is no starting point for any argument unless one presupposes something or initially holds a belief which appears to be true. Only then can one start to test and, if need be, correct a belief or a theological statement. Theologically speaking, human beings cannot prove the belief in the Trinity but rather have to presuppose it as something given within the condition of human experience in order to test it from the perspective of human experience.[2] Looking back to the New Testament and the Fathers it was precisely in connection to life as it is lived and to human experience as it is expressed in the manifold stories of different people throughout the history of Israel and early Christianity that the belief in a trinitarian God was soon considered as the overall framework of God-talk. As Dietrich Ritschl rightly points out: 'That is the case because Christian reflection on God had as its theme from the beginning the God of Israel, the coming, suffering and dying of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit.'[3] God was worshiped in a community of believers made up of Jews and Gentiles. This worship was experienced as a (not self-created) participation in the Father by the Son in the Spirit. This then highlights both that trinitarian discourse never was merely human discourse for its own sake (pointing to the notion of revelation as something given) and that it had to serve and be in agreement with the communities' and one's own experience of salvation within the conditions of

[2] See below sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2.

[3] *The Logic of Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 144. Cf. G. O'Collins, *The Tripersonal God*, 1-82; Roger Olson and Christopher Hall, *The Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 1-11.

human life (pointing to human experience as the platform on which this belief could be reasonably held and made intelligible).

In conclusion, what an interstitial methodology attempts to provide is space for an open and creative encounter between the concepts of experience and revelation. It seeks to be dynamic and open, to move on and between both levels of discourse, and hence to inhabit the interstice. To adhere to such an *interstitial attitude* of theological investigation then means, first, with respect to the concept of experience, to be aware of both the fact that human experience is the sole ground for doing theology and that this embeddedness does not necessarily rule out the possibility of divine revelation occurring within this condition. Secondly, in regard of the concept of revelation, an *interstitial attitude* is also aware of both the possibility that divine revelation might meaningfully indicate something beyond the realm of human experience and the impossibility of revelation occurring unless it occurs within the realm of human experience. This leads to the following structure.

In the first part of this chapter the main concern lies with the concept of experience and its interrelationship with the concepts of language and truth. My intention is, firstly, to establish a general account of human experience (2.2.1), then, secondly, to clarify its relationship with the concept of language (2.2.2), thirdly, to examine this understanding in relation to metaphorical language and the notion of truth (2.2.3) and, finally, to propose a conclusive summary of how human experience and language function within the human condition (2.2.4). The second part aims at an elaboration of some essential features of the concept of revelation. I will pursue this aim with an interstitial attitude: firstly, slowly moving from experience to revelation (2.3.1), elucidating how the concept of experience aspires after the notion of revelation and then, secondly, developing a concept of revelation more directly as interpreted activity (2.3.2) and by doing so showing how a) revelation is in need of the concept of experience and b) that it is precisely a trinitarian framework that sustains this amicable relationship as the most appropriate one. This discussion will be concluded by an account of how experience, revelation and the Trinity can be conceived as inseparably hanging together (2.3.3). Drawing all the threads together in the final part (2.4), my intention will be to outline some essential aspects for a trinitarian hermeneutics. It is my overall conviction that if theology starts to appreciate the notions of (a) God not violating the human condition, (b) God exposing himself to this condition and (c) God giving his creation as the very possibility and ground for human knowledge and

revelatory experience, then there is no need to draw *false* demarcation lines between revelation and human experience, as well as between theology and anthropology. Although both realms have to be distinguished, leaving space for revelation to occur, trinitarian discourse must be pursued as an interstitial theology. If this interstitiality and theology's dependence on human experience is not approved, trinitarian discourse about God as being-in-communion will most likely fail to depict and appreciate a fuller and richer understanding of its truth.

2.2 EXPERIENCE, LANGUAGE, AND TRUTH

2.2.1 Experience and human reality

2.2.1.1 Theological integrity

In his essay on 'Theological Integrity'[4] Rowan Williams reminds us that theological discourse is there to test the truthfulness of our language and the fidelity and openness to what it says it is about. It is 'the attempt to make sure that we are still speaking of *God* in our narratives.' But, and he rightly insists on this point, theological discourse 'does not do this by trying to test the "truth" of this or that religious utterance according to some canon of supposedly neutral accuracy.'[5] When I now turn to a discussion of the concepts of human experience, language, and truth it is worthwhile to keep this advice in mind. In our pluralist and postfoundationalist context there is no way to return to a foundationalist position by appeal to some inner experiences or any other direct access to states of affairs in virtue of which our theological sentences can be judged true.[6] At the same time, however, since Christians believe in God as the source, sustainer, and consummator of our humanness and morality, one cannot simply do away with the notion of truth and indulge in a world of private taste. If there is a common hope for human beings and if there is a common humanness that reflects somehow God's

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[4] *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 3-15.

[5] Ibid., 14.

[6] For a discussion of the epistemic inappropriateness of any claim of interiority: Bruce Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chapters 3 and 4. Cf. Nicholas Lash, *Easter in Ordinary: Reflection on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (London: SCM Press, 1988). Lash, although charitably engaging with Schleiermacher, Newman, Buber, and Rahner, holds firm to the conviction that there is no such thing as raw or pure experience. In my opinion, however, Lash proposes a rather unhelpful distinction between "description" and "reference" arguing that Christian speech about God is 'more a matter of ensuring correct reference than it is of attempting appropriate description' (p. 258). How can language be merely referential without also wanting to be appropriately descriptive?

purposes for this world, then any rejection of foundationalism should not too easily endorse the trends of non-realism or postliberalism.[7] The abandonment of objectivity in the name of particularity and contentions about the incommensurability of different contexts and cultures not only tend to jettison the notion of truth but also the basis for any reasonable communication between human beings. Any attempt towards reconciliation and peace on these terms in a world that is haunted by an accelerating process of globalisation despite a multi-cultural context would simply be doomed to failure. Regarding this one should keep in mind, as Marshall has persuasively shown with reference to analytic philosophy of language,[8] that any suggestion of radical incommensurability on the basis of cultural-linguistic practice negates its own presuppositions. The claim of incommensurability between two competing languages or cultures presupposes that human beings are in fact capable of comparing and thus understanding the other cultural-linguistic system. However, in order to understand the other context human beings are in need of a common reality, be it a belief or the possibility of experience, which transcends each particular context. Saying this is not to suggest that one is actually able fully to disclose this ground and base human knowledge on a foundation of general experience. Such an option is not viable. Nonetheless the possibility of meaningful communication and human interaction does emphasise, against any claims of radical particularity and incommensurability, that for meaningful communication and human interaction to be operative some points of common reference are indispensable.[9] If there is *one* created world, rather than many different worlds, which all human beings inhabit and refer to, then this points to the necessity of giving an account of how this world can be thought of as one and not many. In other words: 'If there is one God, the acts of that God should, *prima facie*, be consistent; the community established by the divine action should have some unifying points of reference; and reflective speech of that community should in some way articulate the divine consistency, or, at the very least, be able to deal with and contain what seems to make for fragmentation.'[10] Anybody who talks about fragmentation, or in a cultural-linguistic manner about plurality, particularity or incommensurability, should be aware of the fact that speech about fragmentation only is meaningful if there exists

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[7] For brief discussion of the inadequacy of theological non-realism and the limitations of Lindbeckian postliberalism: Paul Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology in Pragmatist Perspective* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 10-6.
[8] *Trinity and Truth*, 141-79.
[9] See also Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty – Über Gewissheit* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975).
[10] Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 21.

some kind of holistic concept or at least an imagination of what wider picture these fragments actually are fragments of. Fragments without a notion of the whole become wholes themselves, that is isolated and self-sufficient realities. But then human beings would not live in one world any more but in many. Hence I wonder if the emergence of Lindbeckian postliberalism with its whole-hearted advocacy of a cultural-linguistic model, in opposition to experiential models, is really helpful in respect to theological integrity and the complexity of life. In order to highlight the need for a rather different and more balanced account of the concepts of experience and language let me now turn to Lindbeck's influential work *The Nature of Doctrine*.[11]

2.2.1.2 Contra Lindbeck: Experience as a basic form of living in one world

Lindbeck attempts to re-describe the relation between cultural-linguistic contexts and experience. While trying to safeguard what is distinctive about the Christian voice within a pluralistic context, Lindbeck fails to satisfy, precisely in respect of the relationship between language and experience and how this refers to a reasonable notion of truth. Lindbeck not only seems to presuppose a sharp demarcation between experience and language but also favours the latter as the one that determines the former.[12] Surprisingly he does not engage in a thorough investigation of the relation between language and experience as such, but rather takes the concept of "inner experience" as it is employed by theologians such as Rahner and Lonergan as the normative meaning. These theologians, according to Lindbeck, understand experience ultimately as pre-linguistic, as an experience that, 'while conscious, may be unknown on the level of self-conscious reflection.'[13] This experience is present in all human beings and therefore forms the basic factor, an *a priori* condition, for the formation of a religion. What Lindbeck wants to stress is that theologians who support such an experiential-expressive model assume that there is a general primordial religious experience of ultimate concern (Paul Tillich) or of the holy as a *mysterium fascinans et tremendum* (Rudolf Otto) which precedes the cultural-linguistic embeddedness of

[11] *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984). Hereafter [*NoD*].
[12] A similar tendency can be observed in Hans Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992). Frey obviously influenced Lindbeck's proposal by drawing a rather sharp demarcation between "Christian self-description" and "external description." Cf. Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 38.
[13] *NoD*, 31.

human beings.[14] In taking up and countering this model, Lindbeck adheres without questioning to the same and somewhat misleading opposition between "inner experience" and "external religion", the latter indicating a concrete belief in its cultural and linguistic forms and structures. While Lindbeck rightly asserts that religions and all theological discourse are cultural-linguistically structured, he is reluctant to reconceive the notion of experience in a different way from the representatives of the experiential-expressive model. This negligence results in seeing religions 'as comprehensive interpretive schemes, usually embodied in myths or narratives and heavily ritualised, which structure human experience and understanding of self and world.'[15] This suggests that religion has to be viewed as a cultural and linguistic framework that shapes the life and thought of this community. Experience is subordinated and therefore secondary to the language framework of a given community. Lindbeck reverses the relation between "inner" and "outer" and conceives of inner experiences as derived from the external features of a religion. 'Thus the linguistic-cultural model is part of an outlook that stresses the degree to which human experience is shaped, moulded, and in a sense constituted by cultural and linguistic forms.'[16]

The crucial point is that Lindbeck is prepared to admit that language is a precondition for the possibility of experience, but, due to his misleading equation of the complexity of human experience with inner pre-linguistic experience, he is not willing to simultaneously say that *experiencing the world* might also be a precondition for the possibility of saying something at all. The cultural-linguistic formation of a given community gains a kind of quasi-transcendental status[17] while the very possibility of saying something at all due to human beings' experiencing the world does not come to the fore. 'In short,' he concludes, 'it is necessary to have the means for expressing an experience in order to have it, and the richer our expressive or linguistic system, the more subtle, varied, and differentiated can be our experience.'[18] Experience is reduced to an act of intelligible communication. Without language there is no experience. But since language depends entirely on the cultural-linguistic framework Lindbeck further asserts that in the same way there is no private experience. He supports his argument with Wittgenstein's insight that private languages are logically impossible. While this is certainly true in respect to language, it does not follow that experience can either be

[14] *NoD*, 31-2.
[15] *NoD*, 32.
[16] *NoD*, 34.
[17] *NoD*, 36.
[18] *NoD*, 37.

equated with or subordinated to language. If the concept of experience is viewed in the light of the human condition in which nobody ever shares my particular point of view (the other remaining other) and in which my being in the world exhibits a relational interaction between perception and action, between matter and mind, then reference to experience also indicates that human beings live in the world as embodied entities, which is more then purely linguistic.[19] At this point Lindbeck reads Wittgenstein rather one-sidedly.

Our *experiencing* of the world, although utterly amalgamated with language, expresses more than conscious language games. Experience displays a complex embeddedness of human beings in the world as parts of this world, which are all, in one way or another, connected with each other. This complexity is the givenness that Wittgenstein names *Lebensformen*. When Wittgenstein talks about *Sprachspiele* he rather supports a holistic view. The whole of language and all the acts and doings of life are included in his vision.[20] He is quite clear about the fact that the word *Sprachspiel* should underline that the speaking of a language is part of an action, of a form of life.[21] These *Lebensformen* are the reason why the meaning of language can never be settled ultimately. The meaning of words depends on the usage of the words within a language and this usage again depends on the *Lebensformen*.[22] This includes the notion that language is not always capable of expressing what we experience. Consider the following example that Wittgenstein provides.

> Compare: *knowing* and *saying*:
> how many metres high is Mont-Blanc –
> how is the word "game" used –
> what is the sound of a clarinet.
> Anybody who is surprised that one could know something but not express it, probably has in mind an example of the first kind but definitely not of the third kind.[23]

Wittgenstein's contention is that language is like a labyrinth of paths[24] and that one main reason of philosophical ailments is a one-sided diet, that one nourishes oneself only with one kind of examples and perspectives.[25] Hence Wittgenstein's notion of *Lebensformen* suggests that, since the *Lebensformen* exhibit the complexity of what

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[19] For a detailed discussion of what it means to be human: Chapter Three.
[20] 'Ich werde auch das Ganze: der Sprache und der Tätigkeiten, mit denen sie verwoben ist, das „Sprachspiel" nennen': Philosophische Untersuchungen, I, 7, in *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Werkausgabe Band 1* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984), 225-580. Hereafter: [PU].
[21] PU, I, 23.
[22] PU, I, 43.
[23] PU, I, 78. [My translation.]
[24] PU, I, 203: 'Die Sprache ist ein Labyrinth von Wegen. Du kommst von *einer* Seite und kennst dich aus; du kommst von einer anderen zur selben Stelle, und kennst dich nicht mehr aus.'
[25] PU, I, 593.

human beings in relation with one another and their environment experience (*erleben*), the concept of experience cannot be reduced to an account of language. Furthermore, it should be noted that Wittgenstein's notion of *Lebensformen* is established against the love of the self of philosophical solipsism and against a notion of self-experience that claims to be capable (without depending on the other) of depicting the reality of being. It is the being-in-the-world and being-part-of-the-world that human beings all share, as Fergus Kerr observes, 'the only *a priori* in Wittgenstein's philosophical vision of human life: our *Lebensformen.*'[26] All this rather points to a balanced relation between human experience and language, which cannot be disentangled. If Wittgenstein maintains that there is no inner experience that does not have conceptual links with other people's experience, then this again is a confirmation of our *Lebensformen* which human beings share rather than a subordination of experience to language.

> For Wittgenstein, it is our bodiliness that founds our being able, in principle, to learn any natural language on earth. In contrast to the metaphysical conception of the self, where our bodies supposedly get between us and prevent a meeting of minds, Wittgenstein reminds us of the obvious fact that the foundation of mutual understanding is the human body, with its manifold responsiveness and expressiveness.[27]

Considering this insight, it is rather the notion of "experiencing the world" as (matter-mind) bodies that make the learning of language possible as well as giving Wittgenstein the ground for asserting that there is no private language at all. If the concept of experience is conceived on the grounds of our bodily being and living in the world, which depends on the biological act of perception and movement, then the concept of experience must display a basic form of living in the world in distinction from the concept of language. On a Lindbeckian account, however, one cannot appreciate the givenness of both experience and language as entirely bound up with one another without subordinating one to the other.

What are the consequences? In proposing a postliberal theology Lindbeck envisages the Christian religion as one cultural-linguistically shaped community drawing a distinction between "intratextual" and "extratextual", the latter referring to the understanding of religion as propositional and the former to his own cultural-linguistic approach.[28] Due to the fact that Lindbeck abandons the notion of foundation for theology altogether he concludes:

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[26] *Theology after Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 105.
[27] Ibid., 109.
[28] *NoD*, 114.

> Thus the proper way to determine what "God" signifies, for example, is by examining how the word operates within a religion and thereby shapes reality and experience rather than by first establishing its propositional or experiential meaning and reinterpreting or reformulating its use accordingly. It is in this sense that theological description in the cultural-linguistic mode is intrasemiotic and intratextual.[29]

This leads him to assert that in order to expound and to understand the belief of a particular religion one has to speak its language. Theology is entirely intratextual. 'It is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text.'[30] On a larger scale this means that human knowledge and theology not only remain utterly particular and therefore exclude any notion of universals but also that to 'the degree that religions are like languages and cultures, they can no more be taught by means of translation than can Chinese or French.'[31] The result is that '[t]he grammar of religion, like that of language, cannot be explicated or learned by analysis of experience, but only by practice. ... In short, religions, like languages, can be understood only in their own terms, not by transposing them into an alien speech.'[32]

This conclusion is rather odd since Lindbeck himself draws on Wittgenstein saying that there is no private language. However, if the differences between cultural-linguistic communities become insurmountable, 'so that translation of concepts becomes impossible, then we are no longer in one world.'[33] Furthermore it can be argued that with this assumption Lindbeck draws a sharp demarcation between Christian tradition with its own cultural-linguistic framework and the modern secularised culture. Paul Murray has rightly suggested in a discussion of Lindbeck's proposal that 'within an ecclesiological perspective appropriately shaped by the doctrine of creation and eschatology respectively there is an important sense in which the Church is *not* fundamentally "other" than the world. Rather, the Church precisely is the world explicitly before God.'[34] In view of this, David Brown emphasizes the ambiguity that postliberal theologies, on the one hand, appear to say 'that all that matters is membership of the Christian community;' on the other hand, however, they suggest 'that we cannot do otherwise than acknowledge our membership of the wider culture and academic community.' But is the situation not 'immeasurably more complicated? Not only are we all members of a number of different intellectual communities, some

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[29] *NoD*, 114.
[30] *NoD*, 118.
[31] *NoD*, 129.
[32] *NoD*, 129.
[33] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 105.
[34] *Reason, Truth and Theology*, 15.

coextensive with church membership and others not, but also there exists considerable pluralism in the Church, and indeed even within ourselves.'[35]

One is surprised how Lindbeck is able to hold together both the conviction of postliberal antifoundationalism and the endeavour of finding ways for communicating an incommensurable belief (the Christian religion) to non-Christians. The postliberal answer for dealing with the question of mission and the communication of religious belief, Lindbeck suggests, resembles ancient catechesis. 'Instead of redescribing the faith in new concepts, it seeks to teach the language and practice of the religion to potential adherents.'[36] At this point Lindbeck is quite inconsistent. One might ask him how a potential adherent who does not speak the Christian language and who was brought up, for instance, in an utterly non-Christian and non-Western culture and environment is ever able to understand this language. Since this person is utterly dependent upon his native non-Christian language and has no possibility to translate the alien Christian language into his own, there seems to be no way that he can learn the new language. If, however, Lindbeck suggests that this person can learn and meaningfully understand the Christian language because he lives with the Christian community and takes part in their rituals and practices, then, this will only be possible if he can assume that what he *experiences* in this alien community is at least in part somehow commensurable with and therefore translatable into his own native language.[37] A concept of learning through participation and progressive understanding of belief through practice precisely depends on a concept of experience which is not subordinated to language but rather helps to connect particular contexts.[38] It is interesting to see how Lindbeck suddenly shifts his emphasis from language to practice.

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[35] *Discipleship and Imagination: Christian Tradition and Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 355.

[36] *NoD*, 132.

[37] For another perspective on the interpretation of language and the possibility of translation: Marshall, *Trinity and Truth*. Taking up Davidson's analytic philosophy of language, Marshall highlights the interconnectedness between truth, belief, and meaning for every act of interpretation and the understanding of a foreign language. If Davidson is right, Marshall argues, then 'interpretation will have to hold for truth while testing for meaning' (p. 93). Davidson calls this the "principle of charity." This approach suggests that understanding the meaning of a sentence, and therefore any successful interpretation, depends on 'applying the "principle of charity" across the board, that is, to all actual and possible utterances of a group of speakers, and thus to their language as a whole. The "principle of charity" applies a holistic constraint to interpretation' (p. 94). From this perspective any radical notion of incommensurability, which Lindbeck seems to have in mind, is untenable because it makes no sense. 'In order to say that the beliefs of another community belong to a worldview which is for us alien or foreign, we have to know what their beliefs are – we have to understand them. Beliefs we cannot comprehend are obviously beliefs we cannot classify as either foreign or domestic' (p. 161).

[38] With respect to the Christian context: Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, 16. 'In line with the fleshly materiality of orthodox Christian faith in the incarnation the tradition is always shaped in part at least by the broader social, cultural and linguistic contexts in which it is enacted.'

He asserts, 'intelligibility comes from skill, not theory, and credibility comes from good performance, not adherence to independently formulated criteria.'[39] Reasonableness in theology has something of an aesthetic character. This conclusion poses again the basic question of how we know and recognize a good performance and how we agree on good art or on true aesthetics without some common points of reference. It is precisely on the grounds of his own cultural-linguistic proposal that Lindbeck fails to show how the postliberal model of doing theology 'does not reduce the choice between different frameworks to whim and chance.'[40] Moreover, any attempt to draw a clear demarcation line between Christianity and its texts and other religions or cultural-linguistic communities displays an oversimplification of the complexity of human and hence cultural interaction and cross fertilisation. Christian tradition and the development of doctrines display not only a picture of diversity but also a process that expresses a continuing dialogue with foreign claims. Many of these processes have resulted in the assimilation of initially foreign imaginations or narratives and thus exhibit the Christian tradition's capability of renewal and its imaginative and integrative power.[41] Precisely on a linguistic account, the claim of Wittgenstein would be that language does not merely hover on the surface of things but, because language is not rationally invented by human beings,[42] actually tells us something about the reality of our *Lebensformen*. The fact that the search for reality and truth always leads us to human life as it is lived suggests that one must think of reality 'as consisting precisely in the kind of multifaceted complex of contextually specific interrelationships and interactions that comes to articulation, albeit partially, in language.'[43] This coming to articulation, in turn, depends on experiencing (*erfahren, erleben*) the world that makes cross-cultural communication in one and the same world possible.

2.2.1.3 Experience as the determination of reality

Having argued that postliberalism fails to address the concept of experience in an appropriate way, I now would like to turn to Christoph Schwöbel's account of

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[39] *NoD*, 131.
[40] *NoD*, 130.
[41] For a profound study of the development of Christian Tradition: David Brown, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
[42] 'Language neither grew on human beings like hair nor did they sit down and invent it. Language is not the product of thought or will': Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 114.
[43] Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, 73.

experience.[44] His approach is a helpful one because he engages not only thoroughly with the concept of experience but also does so with the intention of overcoming a somewhat unfruitful dichotomy between the concepts of experience and revelation. Although I will not take up the discussion of revelation until the next part of this chapter it is vital to keep this horizon already in mind. In theology both the concepts of revelation and experience played and still play a crucial role. While theologies centred on revelation stress the notion of God's freedom and tend to anchor the notion of truth in a divine act of communication independent of human manipulation, theologies centred on experience tend to emphasise modernity's notion that all human knowledge, hence also theological knowledge, is inescapably fused with human experience dependent on historical-cultural-linguistic frameworks. Consequently, even if there is such a thing as truth or objectivity, the door of direct access is locked. Regarding this dilemma Schwöbel's account of experience can function as a step forward in the right direction.

> The task which seems to follow from these observations of the problematical character of a theology of revelation which excludes the concept of experience and of a theology of experience in which the concept of revelation has no place, consists in considering whether the alternative of seeing either revelation or experience as the foundational concept of theology is, in fact, justified. Are there possibilities of relating revelation and experience in such a way that we can avoid the risk we have indicated and can conceive of both concepts as signifying complementary aspects of a single phenomenon?[45]

Given this task Schwöbel sets out to overcome reductionist conceptions of experience that equate experience with a process of perception. He argues that if experience is identified with perception alone 'the understanding of reality is reduced to the exposition of a mechanism of stimulus and response.'[46] A person *x*, it is usually assumed, experiences *y* and in 'a basic process of perception a certain bundle of sensory stimuli which affect our sensory apparatus is isolated and becomes the object of our perceptual attention in the context of our "holistic" bodily indwelling of our environment.'[47] This process of perception is not only purely individual but also

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[44] *God: Action and Revelation* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992). Hereafter [*God*].
[45] *God*, 86. Schwöbel's emphasis on "aspects of a single phenomenon" is crucial here because – given, for instance, Tillich's method of correlation in his *Systematic Theology*, Volume 1 (London: Nisbet & Co., 1953) – theologians might engage in a friendly way with human experience but still understand revelation as something totally distinct and ultimately detached from experience and human knowledge. Schleiermacher is more helpful here. Granted that we do not share his idealistic assumptions, his understanding of revelation in connection with the pious self-consciousness emphasises an amicable encounter between revelation and experience; hence they are not conceived as opposites or as mutually excluding one another: *Der Christliche Glaube* (1830/31), esp. §§ 10, 13.
[46] *God*, 111.
[47] *God*, 104.

presupposes that human perception takes place linearly in a way that, firstly, we are passively affected by stimuli and, secondly, react actively by directing our attention to a particular object.[48] This view presupposes a simple subject-object distinction, neglecting the fact that a human individual not only is a subject of perception but at the same time an object of another experiencing subject. Moreover, since on this reductionist account all perception is individual, the notion of objectivity tends ultimately to be abandoned altogether because, it is assumed, we have no access to it. Such a narrow and one-sided perspective, Schwöbel contends, could never function as an organizing concept for all human knowledge because it is not able to deal with the complexity of normal experience. An appropriate account of experience has to deal with the relational aspects of life and both the mutuality of the concepts of subject and object and the interconnectedness between reality as it is and as human beings perceive it.

Hence Schwöbel begins with the following basic formula that a human person experiences something as something: '*A experiences x as y.*'[49] With this formula he indicates that the normal situation of experience not only consists of isolating something as an object of perception but also of interpretation. The term *y* therefore expresses the interpretation of *x*. Human experience is always amalgamated with language and a particular framework of interpretation. Signification and interpretation, or in other words, semiotics and semantics go hand in hand with any act of experience. This is why any object *x*, isolated by the experiencing subject from its wider environment, is always experienced as *y*. However, being embedded in a framework does not mean that *x* loses its objective reality altogether. Hence Schwöbel extends the formula in the following way: '*A experiences x as y by integrating x through the predication as y into the interpretative framework I.*'[50] With this formula he maintains the importance of the concepts of the subject, the object (and the notion of truth) and its interconnectedness within a common linguistic framework of interpretation. This formula displays the crucial role of the interpretative framework. Although it is always historically concrete and shaped by cultural, social and scientific presuppositions, the interpretative framework provides a common ground of some kind of objective reality. Every individual experience does not remain completely individualistic because it cannot escape the processes of signification and interpretation, which in turn depend on this common framework. If experiences ultimately contribute or prepare the ground for

[48] For a critique of linear causality within the process of human perception: Chapter Three, section 3.4.3
[49] *God*, 105.
[50] *God*, 105.

knowledge about our common reality they can only do so in connection with the interpretative framework. This framework 'provides with its predicates and structuring models for our experience the conditions for the interpretation of reality and, with that, the conditions for our active organisation or reality.'[51] Schwöbel's *interpretative framework* appears to function in a similar way as Wittgenstein's *Lebensformen.* Because everybody participates in it, depends on it, and contributes to it, this framework makes sense and can only be labelled meaningful if it *de facto* reflects and lives within a common reality.

All this points towards both an overlap and a crucial distinction between experience and reality. Human experience remains in a sense individual because it will always be mine. Nobody will ever share my distinctive perspective. However, my experience can only be called individual because it exhibits a fragment of a larger piece. Despite its particularity it is a part of the broader picture and lives within a wider framework of which it mirrors something. Experience and reality go hand in hand. Otherwise all talk about human life and the human world would indeed be non-real, a deceptive imagination, and everybody would be isolated in his or her own world.[52] This does not mean that experience can be equated with reality. Individual experience in order to say something true about the common reality is in need of the interpretative framework. It will most likely reach beyond its particularity into the realm of truth if it becomes meaningful for the wider community, if it becomes itself a part of the interpretative framework. Looking from this perspective, human experience must be depicted as an "active and constructive process" while simultaneously maintaining that it is not arbitrary but depends on a common reality. Living in *one* world is an essential premise for the possibility of experiencing and interpreting the world in which we live.

Having highlighted these basic conditions of experience from a rather observational perspective in the form of *A experiences x as y*, Schwöbel extends his concept as we have seen. One must also inquire after the role of the subject of experience. Such an inquiry will necessarily result in the acknowledgment of an understanding of subjects of experience as conscious human beings capable of choice, interpretation, and self-perception. Experiencing not only means the perception of an object and its predication within an interpretative framework but also includes the self-

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[51] *God*, 106.

[52] This highlights the crucial point made earlier that any radical claim of non-realism contradicts itself because it presupposes a certain kind of meaningful understanding of the "other worlds". To judge an experience as non-realistic or as deceptive imagination is only possible on the ground of a common idea of reality.

experiencing of a subject within the process of experience. 'It is therefore inevitable to assume that reflexive self-experience can accompany all acts of the synthesis of experience.'[53] Hence the initial formula has to be extended in this way: '*(A experiences) A experiences x as y, insofar as x is integrated into the interpretative framework I by interpreting it as y.*'[54]

With this formula Schwöbel suggests that self-experience not only is an inherent part of any act of experience but also that ultimately the interpretative framework 'exists only in the form of personal appropriation.'[55] If this is acknowledged then the relational character and the interdependence between different subjects of experience can be expressed. This leads to a more complex conceptualisation of human experience, for it can now be asserted a) that human experience of the world and of each other as a cultural-linguistic event depends inescapably on the mutual experience of each other and b) that the interpretative framework does not exist as a neutral entity on its own but only exists as social communication and interaction.[56] The concept of human experience is therefore based on the fundamental reciprocal experience of *A experiences B* which simultaneously depends on *B experiences A*. Behind both persons *A* and *B* stands the full formula mentioned above. Both persons have to acknowledge the other as a self-experiencing subject of experience. This expresses a 'constitutive mutuality and reciprocity of personal relations'[57] indicating a dialectical structure of all human experience. Both *A* and *B* contribute to the interpretative framework and consequently to the interpretation of reality, while not having created it. Both depend on this given reality for their own self-experience; they cannot disconnect from it, while being able to freely participate in and respond to it.

Hence, there is more to human experience than the notion of subjectivity. Human beings who live in one world and participate in the interpretation of reality through experience find themselves placed between both dialectical structures of freedom and dependence and particularity and universality. This implies that the notion of personal freedom is only conceivable against the background of this discussion. Schwöbel concludes: 'The condition for the possibility of self-experience appears in the personal experience of freedom as something that is given in, with and under all acts of experience, but not as constituted by the subject of reflection.' This entails 'that for all

[53] *God*, 107.
[54] *God*, 107.
[55] *God*, 107.
[56] *God*, 107-8.
[57] *God*, 109.

subjects of experience there is a difference between what is constituted for the experiencing subject and what is constituted by the experiencing subject.'[58] This statement confirms the earlier crucial distinction between experience and reality and expounds it a little further. Given the premise that human beings live in one world and that human communication and interaction in fact is real and not a ghostly and fake non-sense activity, Schwöbel is able to contend that reality can *de facto* be experienced by actively reflecting subjects of experience without equating the one with the other. This discloses a "fundamental openness of reality" towards human experience. Reality and human experience must not be disconnected and viewed as alien and exclusive entities. Although human experience remains fragmental, it has the capacity of truth.

This conceptualisation allows Schwöbel to distinguish between two levels. One level refers to reality as beyond human experience. It is the level of reality that is *constituted for* the experiencing subject as the condition of the possibility of human experience. This reality that is a given, and from a theological perspective indicates the doctrine of creation, is not *objectively* accessible for human beings since human beings are part of this reality. The other level also refers in a certain sense to this given reality but not from an observational outsider view but rather from an insider perspective. It expresses reality as being *subjectively* accessible by human beings from within. This reality is constituted by the experiencing subjects[59] from within the given reality as an active and creative process of experiencing the world. This permits the view of seeing the interpretative activity of experiencing subjects itself as being part of this reality. Reality in this sense then can be understood 'as the sum of possible experience which is in its different layers open for the acts of signification' and interpretation.[60] Both levels of reality can be distinguished conceptually but at the same time viewed as overlapping. In a nutshell, Schwöbel arrives 'at the interpretation of the concept of experience where experience is understood as the determination of reality as an object of experience and certainty, by interpreting and organizing subjects on the basis of the disclosedness of reality for the signifying acts of self-experiencing subjects of perception and interpretation.'[61]

By taking a closer look at this summarizing statement it will be possible to depict both strength and weakness of Schwöbel's proposal. The strength of his conceptuali-

[58] *God*, 109. Cf. Levinas' notion of "otherwise than being", Chapter Three, section 3.4.4.
[59] *God*, 110.
[60] *God*, 111.
[61] *God*, 111.

sation is the overcoming of a one-sided Lindbeckian postliberalism, in which the notion of experience was subordinated to language and dissolved into a particular cultural framework. Reality and truth consequently were utterly relegated to the realm of particularity. Schwöbel's account moves a step forward. It shows how reality can intelligibly be spoken of as both God-given (and therefore universal) and accessible for human interpretation within the process of experience. This approach has the strength of holding both sides together. Firstly, it can be acknowledged that human experience and knowledge is particular and subjective and therefore never total or absolute. The notion of truth remains partial and is always embedded in a process of dialogue and reciprocal human interaction. Particularity, however, since human beings are a real part of reality itself, does not contradict the notion of truth and human beings' possibility of expressing it. Secondly, it can also be maintained that the process of human experience and interaction is only possible on the ground of a given reality, which reaches beyond the particular and therefore guarantees meaningful interpretation and intelligible knowledge of the world. Partial and subjective human interpretations of truth therefore stand always in relation to universal truth. God-given reality is not objectively accessible for us but it displays the condition for human beings' capacity of meaningfully experiencing and interpreting the world at all. A Christian account of truth about God and the world, therefore, cannot retreat from the task of looking beyond its own intra-textual or intra-cultural context. It is precisely at this point, as I will argue later, that the concept of revelation need not be opposed to the concept of experience. If God reveals godself at all, then revelation must not contradict but rather has to be sought within the active and creative process of experience.

The weakness of Schwöbel's account, on the other hand, lies in his one-sided adherence to a structural formula that presses the notion of experience into a clear-cut system. Although Schwöbel wants to escape empiricism with its simple subject-object distinction and its equation of experience with perception, he partly fails to do so. His own reflections are a huge improvement but still adhere to the same distinctions. Proposing the basic formula '*(A experiences) A experiences x as y, insofar as x is integrated into the interpretative framework I by interpreting it as y*', Schwöbel obviously differentiates between many levels of human life's complexity but still views experience mainly within the framework of a "self-experiencing I" perceiving "another self-experiencing I" or an object of the created world. Not surprisingly he speaks of experience as the determination of reality as an *object* of experience. With this

definition Schwöbel tends to suggest that we are somehow dealing with clear-cut entities or objects, that is a particular object *x*, which can be clearly isolated from its wider context, and a comprehensive *y*, which provides us with an intelligible interpretation. But is that not too simplistic?[62] Does not such an approach still presuppose an observational perspective like in the natural sciences where one observes from the outside how things relate and function? Is human life not more complex? Does not human experience once we enter the realm of emotional and sensual experience burst any structural formula? If the concept of experience indicates an active and creative process of interpretation, then Schwöbel's formula meets its limitations. Once I think about experiencing life as it is lived, for example, a particular event where I meet people and experience different affections and emotions, I will realize that it is not helpful at all to express such an event in the formula of '*A experiences this birthday party as deeply satisfying.*' What does "party" really signify and what does "deeply satisfying" really mean? Given Wittgenstein's notion of "*Sprachspiele*" and its embeddedness in the "*Lebensformen*", do we not rather have to assume a more complex interwovenness of *x*, *y*, and an *interpretative framework* in real life? What about human memory that has to be conceived as in a state of flux rather than a storage room of fixed data? What about the experience of events that reach beyond any adequate description? Life is more complex than his formula tends to suggest. The question of how humans are able to figure out what interpretations of their experiences are more real or true than others in order to gain a better knowledge of the common reality as it is actually given to us by God is still in need for clarification. It cannot simply be answered by applying this altogether too simplistic formula to our experiences. While approving whole-heartedly of his claim that reality is accessible for experiencing human subjects, the crucial question of how discourse about truth and reality can be pursued, without recourse to an objective foundation, must now be addressed. Since discourse is always linguistic it has to be shown how language relates to experience and participates in experience's possibility of expressing truth.

[62] Cf. Chapter Three, section 3.4.3. There I argue from a biological perspective that human beings as *living beings* are far more interconnected with the environment and their perception of it than empiricism and physics seem to be aware of.

2.2.2 Re-conceiving experience and language

2.2.2.1 Experience: A way of being in the world

What I am now attempting to do is to develop a balanced account of the concepts of experience and language and how they are capable, although partially, to express truth about God and the world. Since all reflection and discourse cannot operate without language my aim in the following subsections will be to focus on the fact that human experience and therefore all conscious perception of the world and all experience of God is inescapably linked with language. At this point it might be noted, given the weakness of Schwöbel's structural formula, that I do not intend to give a clear definition of experience. Rather my premise is to find out what experience might mean in due course as I go along. For the time being I simply take experience not so much as a noun but rather as a verb. This has to do with my own native German *Lebensform*. The German language uses the terms '*Erlebnis*' and '*Erfahrung*'. These nouns are abstractions and generalisations of the verbs '*erleben*' and '*erfahren*'. Their roots '*leben*' and '*fahren*' are expressions of movement, doing, and happening. Experience has something to do with living life as it is, perceiving the environment and acting within it as well as encountering people.[63] Experience entails the whole human being, body and mind, and the environment in which they live. Humans depend on experience in order to develop knowledge of the world. Simultaneously it can be maintained that already gained knowledge, and hence some kind of beliefs that are held true, will affect and influence future experiences. This is a complex matter. Experience signifies a way of being in the world as conscious human beings that cannot be totally grasped or defined by a single concept.[64] Therefore I prefer to keep the concept open and to develop some understanding of it in connection with the concept of language.

To pursue this aim I simply assert that the complexity of life finds one expression in the mutual dependency between experience and language. In other words, they form two sides of the same coin called human life. The relation between experience and language must be conceived as a dialectical structure. On the one hand, experience, indicating human beings' awareness and perception of being alive and being-in-the-world which underlies all human knowledge and reflection, exhibits the precondition

[63] This is also true for the English term "experience" if it is seen in the light of its Latin root *experiens / experior*.
[64] Cf. Astley, *Exploring God-talk*, 15-8.

for the possibility of language. But at the same time, on the other hand, it has to be claimed that without language the possibility of bringing those experiences to the surface of life and to the surface of the consciousness of being would be missing. Without language there would be no experience as a meaningful and therefore true interpretation of being. Experience seems to aspire after speech, it wants to become conscious and expressed. Experience is in need of a voice to gain meaning. The notion of meaning implies interpretation and points to the necessity of signification and identification as a condition for language to be operative. Language appears to be conceptual and although actual life-experience tends to transcend language and to exceed the means of conceptual expression, it nevertheless depends upon signification and therefore conceptualisation. The notions of experience and language (including conceptualisation) form a complex and close relationship. My intention therefore for the following discussion will be to shed some light on this complexity in order to clarify the relation between the notions of experience, language, and truth and to describe its theological relevance.

2.2.2.2 The sameness and otherness structure of experience

To be human means to have body and soul. This *essential* relational structure between matter and mind, as the condition and givenness of our human existence, already indicates an irreducible connection between some kind of objectivity and subjectivity in which one cannot be thought of without the other. Experience is certainly rooted in this relational structure. Experiencing as a function of the interplay between body and mind is from the very beginning an act of consciousness that expresses a process of reflection by relating one thing to another. The nature of such consciousness cannot exist without signification and identification. Experience always embraces meaning. Language is unavoidable. The very fact that a particular individual is not identical with another individual, that is to say, that the other person always remains the other without becoming me, and that human beings find themselves in a way set against a world as something that can be experienced, entails the distinction of sameness and otherness which can be expressed in categories such as subjectivity and objectivity, I and Thou, I and the world. But this very distinction as a precondition of experience within the human mind indicates a certain kind of experiential conceptual captivity. Experience can only be subjective if there is something which can be experienced as other and

which is indeed different from the individual *I*. The self-experiencing subject can only experience itself as such because it is always embedded in relations (such as the other and I, here and there, now and then, body and mind), which are in turn indications of conceptuality.

From a theological perspective one could also say that the distinction between creator and creation displays the fact that there is already a giver and a receiver before all experience. There is a relation before all experience. There is a distinction and consequently the need for interpretation (to gain meaning) before all experience. There is already a concept, a structure of meaning before all experience. But also from a purely anthropological perspective, there is already the other and the surrounding world as a relational structure for being-in-the-world before all experience. A relational structure as a meaningful givenness for self-experiencing subjects entails concepts of signification, identification, and distinction in order to make sense of all that.

This relational structure exhibits, as I would now like to suggest, a fundamental dialectic between *sameness* and *otherness*. If there is a relation at all it can only be if the other is really other and distinct from me. This otherness carries with it the notion of totality taking into account that the other cannot be reduced to the same. Otherness cannot be annihilated; it always stays in force. A relation would cease to be a real relation if otherness could be dissolved into sameness. However this otherness can only be a meaningful otherness for a self-experiencing subject if the subject is able to make sense of it, that is to say, understands the other as other in distinction to oneself. This is a crucial point for this also entails the notion of sameness as a constitutive part of the structure of experience. As a self-experiencing subject I can only make sense of something or someone in relating this other something or someone to my experience of being-in-the-world. If there is a relation at all, then there must be a connection between the other and myself. Otherness becomes only visible and factual and consequently meaningful in terms of sameness. Otherwise there would be no understanding of being and of human life as relational, there would be no comprehension and communication. Sameness is indispensable for a relation to make sense and to receive meaning. A relation would cease to be a relationship if there were no connection at all.

In view of this it must be assumed that *human experience is rooted in an irreducible relational structure of otherness and sameness*. Otherness and sameness form the two focal points of human experience's ellipse, simultaneously they exclude

and include each other, remain strangers and friends.[65] If knowledge of being-in-the-world is possible at all (and this knowledge I want to call truth in the sense of a true interpretation of human life and the world) and is gained through experience, then this truth can only come to expression in language as an inherent part of experience's sameness-essence. Language is experience's voice in its attempt at expressing otherness in meaningful words of signification and identification. From this point of view language can be conceived as an inherent part of experience's sameness-essence in distinction to experience's otherness-essence, which remains unspeakable and beyond all expression. Although experience is never fully expressible through language, language is capable of bringing some parts of experience to speech and therefore to illuminate and formulate truth about being. This is precisely the strength of language (beside its weakness of reductionism) to make sense of a given, relational reality through a process of relating otherness to sameness, which otherwise would remain silent, inconceivable, void, and meaningless.

2.2.2.3 The paradoxical character of experience

In view of these reflections we should now speak of the *paradoxical character* of experience's sameness and otherness structure, which shows that human life as it is lived cannot be reduced to a tidy concept. On the one hand, self-experiencing subjects are always distinct from one another in a fundamental and irreducible sense. Experience as the basis for reflection, interpretation, and knowledge of our reality of being-in-the-world cannot be utterly reduced to language because language is rooted in the sameness-essence of the relational givenness of the world and therefore violates the otherness-essence. 'My experience,' as Paul Ricoeur points out, 'cannot be directly become your experience. An event belonging to one stream of consciousness cannot be transferred as such into another stream of consciousness.'[66] Experience as an act of consciousness always transcends language and therefore concepts. On the other hand, self-experiencing subjects who are ultimately not capable of experiencing the other's self-experiencing of the world *have to relate* these otherness-experiences to each other

[65] It is a merit of phenomenological research to show that individual life determines itself through self-differentiation from the environment and at the same remaining tied to it. Being and keeping alive upholds a dialectic between distinction and assimilation, between otherness and sameness: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1965), 238.

[66] *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 16.

and presuppose a certain kind of sameness. This relation is a *real* possibility because experience is grounded in the *givenness* of the world, which is the *same* for the other and myself. Otherwise there would be no relating and hence no conscious experience. This means that due to experience's continuous transfer and transformation into language human beings cannot but make sense of the experienced world by employing concepts. In correlation with the notion of truth, expressing a meaningful and at least in part true interpretation of reality, it can be claimed that concepts (due to language's intention of giving experience a voice) disclose and limit reality at the same time. Jacques Derrida's notion of "obliqueness" appears to be helpful at this point to exhibit the concept's dialectic character, pointing to both the disclosure and deflection of truth.[67] However the main issue at stake seems to be the appreciation of experience's inescapable link and interwovenness with the notions of language and the concept as inherent parts of its own essence.

In order to strengthen this proposal I would like to add a further consideration. Language as the means of bringing experience to speech, as an act of describing, narrating, reflecting, comprehending, and communicating and consequently as an act of interpreting and understanding the world and the human condition within a given world and community of human beings, is inherently conceptual. From a linguistic perspective, comprehension and communication depend upon both semiotics (signification and identification) and semantics (meaningful relation between the signs) as an interpretative framework in order to make sense of our experiences. This means that language (in all its forms of signifying and relating sounds, words, objects, emotions, gestures, etc.) is *essential* for being conscious. Language and experience need each other. As a result this relationship also displays the paradoxical character. It can be portrayed as an inseparable interconnectedness between experience, indicating a "prior to language" (a kind of pre-language or pre-conceptual experience due to the otherness-structure of the world's givenness), and language, indicating a "prior to experience" (a kind of pre-experience signification due to the relational givenness of the world and its sameness structure). In other words, if both experience and language are based on the ground of human consciousness, then, on the one hand, the possibility of language

[67] For a discussion of "obliqueness", Derrida, *On the Name* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 3-31. Cf. James Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation* (London: Routledge, 2002), 92: 'The oblique strategy, which indicates both a pointing and a deflection, is a disclosure without full disclosure, an expression without divulgence, a speaking without seizing. So the oblique strategy of formal indication is a non-objectifying employment of concepts which enables one to point to the incommensurable.'

(expressing something meaningful at all) depends utterly on experience. On the other hand, without a reference system, that is to say without language as a concept of identification and signification, which renders it possible that the world in which we live becomes meaningful at all, there would be no experience.

2.2.2.4 The dialectic between conceptual and metaphorical language

Given the argument so far, I sense a somewhat one-sided approach and false dichotomy within philosophical and theological discourse when the initial problem of the relationship between experience and language is formalized in the following way: 'If the very topic of philosophy is *experience*, and if we appreciate that experience is *pre*theoretical, then how will it be possible to theoretically describe this pretheoretical experience?'[68] Such formalization neglects the fundamental relational structure and givenness of the world as noted above and presupposes a dichotomy between conceptual language and experience, *theoria* and *praxis*, language and truth.[69] Maintaining the paradoxical character of experience due to its sameness and otherness structure it must be asked: Can there be factive experience without language and, due to the fact that language is inherently conceptual, without a notion of the concept? How can I experience something without at least already being aware and conscious of this something? How can I experience something meaningful without having a basic concept of correlating this something to me and to my world? Does not experience in order to be meaningful need language and the concept? And on the other side, how can I conceptualise without being inescapably embedded in factual life experience as the "what" and focus of my reflection? How can I experience life without any reference system, that is to say, some kind of meaningful knowledge of the world and human life? It is precisely at this point that one can see how representatives of a postliberal, a non-realistic or a *pre*linguistic-experiential account of reality and truth fail to do justice to the complexity of human life because they draw a misleading and one-sided distinction between experience and language.

[68] Smith, *Speech and Theology*, 4.

[69] Smith notes that Heidegger grappled with this question of how we can do justice to the incommensurability of factual life experience: 'While the concept traffics on the high road of universality, factical life experience is lowly and singular; while the concept is abstract and schematic, "life" is concrete, rich, and dynamic; while the concept is detached and aloof, factical life is engaged and involved; while the concept is a product of *theoria*, experience is a matter of *praxis*': Ibid., 78.

To be clear, to name something and to articulate experience means always to restrict it in the way described above within the dialectical framework of otherness and sameness. Therefore it has to be maintained that language limits being and that the factual and concrete experience in its fullness and completion can never be totally grasped. Experience goes beyond language because experience includes otherness and sameness, while language lives within the sphere of sameness. Nonetheless, to say that experience transcends language is not the same as to assert that experience and language are incommensurable. It is my contention that it is misleading to speak of pre-theoretical experience in opposition to language and the conceptual. Instead one should rather favour a relational approach within the image of an ellipse with two focal points. Following this image I suggest that the understanding of human experience should be anchored in the dialectic structure of otherness and sameness as its essence. Human experience then can be visualized as an ellipse with otherness and sameness as its focal points. Language and concepts circle around the focal point of sameness, while the notions of transcendence and incommensurability circle around the focal point of otherness. This image must not be viewed as a static picture but rather as a dynamic process in which the sphere of language (in its continuous process of signification and conceptualisation in order to make sense of the world and to gain knowledge of the world) is able to expand into the sphere of incommensurability. If one now visualizes that both spheres overlap and connect to a certain degree without being dissolved into one another but remaining intact in their distinctiveness, then this would suggest that the realm of language is dynamic and movable. Consequently, language that is more attentive and sensitive to the otherness-essence of experience will more likely be capable of expressing human experience in a fuller and more meaningful way. This image then points towards language as most meaningful and true to human experience and its transcendence-character when it includes or at least tries to deal with experience's otherness.

Regarding this the question must be faced of which language is the most appropriate for expressing human experience. When experience is brought to speech there is a spectrum of language forms which range from metaphor to proposition. While metaphorical language, stories and images tend to open meaning, conceptual language tends to limit meaning and reduce the playful multiplicity of images to a system.[70]

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[70] Paul Fiddes, 'Story and Possibility: Reflections on the Last Scenes of the Fourth Gospel and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*', in G. Sauter and J. Barton (eds.), *Revelation and Story: Narrative Theology and the Centrality of Story* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 47.

However, there is no playful multiplicity and opening up of meaning unless there is also a concept and the attempt at clarifying speech and interpretation. But the opposite is valid as well: there can be no process of conceptual understanding of reality unless there is open space towards new meaning through the creativity of metaphorical language.[71] The appropriate answer to the question of how to express truth and of how to express knowledge gained through experience, therefore, has to be sought in a creative interaction between metaphorical and conceptual language.[72] This again seems to be a relational process. While metaphorical language opens up space within the realm of otherness, giving conceptual language the opportunity to expand its understanding of human experience, conceptual language in turn clarifies the horizon of this new understanding (implying a kind of reductionism), giving metaphorical language the opportunity to create new playful constructions and new space on the ground of new understanding. To pursue the argument further it now has to be shown that experience's dialectic structure of sameness and otherness extends into the realm of language. I therefore turn to Paul Ricoeur and Eberhard Jüngel as my dialogue partners. In the following discussion, the dialectic of conceptual and metaphorical language emerges as the ground for language's possibility of both expressing truth about the human reality and opening up space for God talk.[73]

2.2.3 Metaphorical truth

2.2.3.1 The in-exhaustiveness of metaphorical language

Ricoeur's approach to language in his *Interpretation Theory*[74] is a relational one. He grounds his theory in an understanding of language as discourse, which indicates the fundamental embeddedness of language within human communication. But communication is not about codes and messages but rather exhibits, be it the "inner communication" of reflection and interpretation within one's own consciousness and

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[71] Many philosophers treat metaphorical language as an irreducible and irreplaceable form of language that can give a real insight into reality. Cf. Astley, *Exploring God-talk*, 36-40.

[72] For a similar point with regard to the relationship between language as biblical narrative and conceptually complex theology: Ritschl, *The Logic of Theology*, 14-27. Cf. also Janet Martin Soskice, in Rupert Shortt, *God's Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), esp. 29-34.

[73] This implication rests on subsection 2.2.1.3 where I argued that God's creation as a given reality, which is open towards human experience, indicates the *possibility* of gaining knowledge about God and the world that can be held true.

[74] *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976). Hereafter: [*IT*].

thinking or the outer communication with other people, an event which depends on an irreducible relation between semiotics and semantics. For this reason Ricoeur departs from the structural model (prioritising semiotics and the superiority of the sign) which sees language as a code 'on the basis of which a particular speaker produces parole as a particular message.'[75] He criticises the structural approach as creating its own world considering language as a self-sufficient system. It loses its essential ground and is disconnected from its reference system, namely human life, in which language always indicates mediation between minds and things.[76] Regarding this he holds that language as discourse has to distinguish between semiotics and semantics but must not rip them apart. Language as discourse and as meaningful communication always generates sentences. But a 'sentence is a whole irreducible to the sum of its parts. It is made up of words, but it is not a derivative function of its words. A sentence is made up of signs, but is not itself a sign.'[77]

This fundamental basis of human language is the very reason why language as discourse has to be described as an event. Messages seen as merely signs or paroles have a temporal existence, they vanish. But "the said as such" with an ontological significance rather lies in a meaning that exists through the relations of signs within the semantic structure. It is the intertwining of noun and verb that exhibits this fundamental event and discloses the propositional content of the said as such. This interplay between noun and verb signifies the two essential functions of discourse as event and consequently also the premises for meaning: identification and predication. Hence Ricoeur holds that '[i]f all discourse is actualised as an event, all discourse is understood as meaning.'[78]

Taking this basic trait of language as discourse for granted Ricoeur highlights the fact that, if we remind ourselves that an important aspect of discourse is its address-character, it is precisely the dialectic of event and meaning which urges us to distinguish between the utterer's meaning and utterance meaning. Here lies the centre of the problem of interpretation. Once an utterance is spoken it gains its own life although it emerged from a speaker with a particular intention. But once the utterer has uttered his words the 'mental meaning can be found nowhere else than in discourse itself' and

[75] *IT*, 3.
[76] *IT*, 6.
[77] *IT*, 7.
[78] *IT*, 12.

therefore 'the utterer's meaning has its mark in the utterance meaning.'[79] Ricoeur nicely describes these two dimensions with the following words.

> My experience cannot directly become your experience. An event belonging to one stream of consciousness cannot be transferred as such into another stream of consciousness. Yet, nevertheless, something passes from me to you. Something is transferred from one sphere of life to another. This something is not the experience as experienced, but its meaning. Here is the miracle. The experience as experienced, as lived, remains private, but its sense, its meaning, becomes public. Communication in this way is the overcoming of the radical non-communicability of the lived experience as lived.[80]

This statement highlights that language as discourse always contains a subjective and an objective side, namely the utterer's meaning and the utterance meaning. However, this dialectic is not all that can be said. It rather has to be pointed out that discourse in its objective sphere says *something* and says *something about* something. Ricoeur calls this the sense (the "what" of discourse) and the reference (the "about what" of discourse).[81] With this distinction he emphasises the essential and indispensable significance that language relates to the world, to actuality, and thus can claim to say something about the reality of the world as it *is*. The realm of language makes the realm of experience (as the basic condition for human perception and knowledge of the world) accessible and that is why language in its relation to the world says something about the ontological condition of our being in the world. Because language is essentially referential it is essentially meaningful and therefore capable of bringing to speech what life and reality is all about.

Proceeding from this understanding of language Ricoeur rejects the traditional concept of metaphor, which defines a metaphor as an ornament of speech. On the traditional account metaphor is understood as a phenomenon of denomination and not of predication. This means that a metaphor, because it does not represent a semantic innovation, does not say anything new about reality. Ricoeur argues that a metaphor as a figure of speech, which depends on the dialectical event of identification and interpretation, belongs to the realm of discourse. Metaphor, therefore, must be understood as a phenomenon of predication. Hence it is wrong to subordinate metaphor to the realm of semiotics in order to assert that a metaphor only 'represents the extension of the meaning of a name through deviation from the literal meaning of

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[79] *IT*, 13.
[80] *IT*, 16.
[81] *IT*, 19.

words.'[82] One should not, as Ricoeur points out, even speak of 'the metaphorical use of a word, but rather of the metaphorical utterance. The metaphor is the result of the tension between two terms in a metaphorical utterance.'[83] This tension emerges out of the connection between two terms that, if understood in a literal sense, would contradict or oppose each other. With reference to the lexical meaning of words one has to say that a metaphorical utterance only starts to make sense if one engages in a kind of interpretative work. A literal interpretation would be nonsensical, but through the process of transformation the metaphorical twist starts to make sense and expands the meaning of reality. This implies the assertion that 'a metaphor does not exist in itself, but in and through an interpretation.'[84] As a result of this reflection Ricoeur maintains that metaphorical language is innovative and creative and does tell us something new about reality. He summarizes as follows:

> In this sense, a metaphor is an instantaneous creation, a semantic innovation which has no status in already established language and which already exists because of the attribution of an unusual or unexpected predicate. Metaphor therefore is more like the resolution of an enigma than a simple association based on resemblance; it is constituted by the resolution of a semantic dissonance.[85]

Finally, this reflection of metaphorical language leads to another implication. Real metaphors that signify a creative innovation are ultimately not translatable. Surely, it may be said, one can find a paraphrase as an attempt of interpreting and clarifying the meaning of a particular metaphorical utterance. However, precisely because a metaphor represents a unique dialectical tension of words, paraphrases and interpretations can never exhaust the innovative meaning of it. If I follow Ricoeur's understanding of metaphorical language and correlate it with my image of experience as an ellipse with the two focal points of otherness and sameness, then I have got an example of how language is capable of expanding into the sphere of otherness without objectifying it, hence resisting the danger of reducing the other totally to the same. It seems that both human experience and conceptual language can find fruitful soil on metaphorical grounds. While the concept's need for clarification can find new possibilities of expression within a metaphorical language, experience's need for coming to speech and at the same time not wanting to be fully disclosed can find enough open space to breathe. This in-exhaustiveness (indicating a respect for the otherness-essence of

[82] *IT*, 49.
[83] *IT*, 50.
[84] *IT*, 50.
[85] *IT*, 52.

experience) as well as the actual possibility for innovative conceptual language (pointing towards new horizons of meaning and knowledge) within metaphorical language already indicate the importance of Ricoeur's understanding of language for theological discourse.

2.2.3.2 Metaphor and theological truth

It is Eberhard Jüngel's conviction that a theological theory of language has to take into account the essential and indispensable concept of revelation as the very possibility for human beings to experience and to bring their experience to speech.[86] Experience depends on the givenness of the creation as something which is constituted by God for the self-experiencing subject. This is even more relevant for the realms of theology and faith in which people try to express something which ultimately reaches beyond the actual of human experience. To say something about God is always to say something more than one actually can perceive, comprehend, and explain within our world. From a theological perspective 'actuality is not the sum of being,'[87] actuality only represents the givenness of the creation insofar it is open to the experience of human subjects. But the givenness of the creation as actuality, which is constituted for the subject of experience by God, is at the same time always amalgamated with a confused actual state of affairs which is constituted by self-experiencing subjects who in turn simultaneously are also the objects of experience. This is why Jüngel can claim at the very start that religious language because it presupposes revelation 'necessarily accords to actuality more than an actual state of affairs can show itself at any particular time, more, indeed, than it is capable of showing for itself at any particular time. ... religious language can only be true religious language when it goes beyond actuality without talking round it.'[88] The always confused actual state of affairs of human experience and reality therefore is not entitled to express the fullness of actuality in the sense of what is constituted for the self-experiencing subject. Regarding this, Jüngel emphasises the fact that the possibility of expressing truth about actuality as that which is given and constituted for human beings depends precisely on a given, a *donum*, as a *potentia aliena* which brings light into the confused states of affairs.[89]

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[86] Eberhard Jüngel, 'Metaphorical Truth', in *Theological Essays I* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 16-71. Hereafter: [MT].
[87] MT, 16.
[88] MT, 16.
[89] MT, 17.

On these grounds Jüngel connects metaphor, as a process which is fundamental to language, with the notion of truth. To do this he follows Ricoeur and departs from the traditional understanding of metaphor, which depends to a large degree on Aristotle's definition that '[m]etaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else.'[90] This view assumes that 'the existence of metaphor is dependent upon the fact that there are non-metaphorical words'[91] and 'that things are normally signified by the ordinary word in common usage.'[92] The result of this view is that, although metaphors are important and language seems to love them, when it comes to the point where truth is at stake, language can also do otherwise.[93] This Aristotelian view subordinates semantics to semiotics and metaphorical language becomes an ornament of speech. But this understanding of metaphor, Jüngel argues, is incorrect. He points out that not only within the realm of statements but also within the realm of language as address we always come across the necessity of having to shape metaphors in hermeneutical emergencies. New things which we experience and new situations which we have to face often lack a *verbum proprium* and therefore are in need of metaphorical signification. Jüngel summarizes:

> A *necessary metaphor* of this kind is the remedy in a hermeneutical emergency, in a situation in which normal language use does not represent a particular state of affairs by a *verbum proprium*, so that (at first) an "ordinary word" for that state of affairs is lacking. In such cases the *verbum proprium* is, as we saw, replaced by a metaphor formed by analogy. The post-Aristotelian tradition calls this necessary metaphor κατάχρησις (*abusio*, catachresis), thereby expressing both that the usage was derivative and that the derivative usage was the normal one. This metaphorical catachresis is enough to call into question the entire traditional theory of metaphor.[94]

With reference to these hermeneutical emergencies Jüngel supports the assumption that there are cases in which metaphors function as the *essence of language* because no *verbum proprium* is available. Hence he is able to contend that 'we need to recognize μεταφορά itself as the event of truth.'[95] It is in this context that one can observe that Jüngel construes his account of metaphorical truth on christological foundations. What he has in mind, when he speaks of the essence of language, is God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Μεταφορα as the event of truth is only a true statement if it is equated with the one event in which God lets himself be discovered, an event for which there was

[90] MT, 35, footnote 42.
[91] MT, 32-3.
[92] MT, 35.
[93] MT, 47.
[94] MT, 47.
[95] MT, 53.

initially no *verbum proprium* available. In this event, that is the incarnation, being *lets itself be discovered* and in this process enters into correlation with what has already been discovered. This process of discovery has to be conceived as something that stands over against human beings who experience themselves as discoverers. It is precisely through this necessary process of creating metaphorical language in order to express states of affairs which cannot be satisfactorily signified and described by already existing words or phrases that we gain new meaning and a new perspective on our reality. Hence Jüngel insists on the passivity of this truth for the human discoverer. Truth is an event in which being lets itself be discovered.[96] Even negative theology in its attempt to avoid defining God constrains itself to non-metaphorical language and consequently speaks of God in favour of semiotics, adhering to a structuralist assumption which regards language as a code. Jüngel reminds us of the fact 'that a metaphorical statement has a new information-value over against a non-metaphorical sentence with the same intention.'[97] In other words, '[m]etaphors expand the horizon of being by going beyond fixation upon actuality with that which is possible, in this way *intensifying* the being of that which is.'[98] However, metaphorical language in its capacity to go beyond what is known within the restrictions of the confused actuality of self-experiencing subjects is the most appropriate language for God-talk only as long as it is bound up with the incarnation.

The incarnation, consequently, is also Jüngel's answer to the problem that not all metaphorical language necessarily is speech of God or truly revealing something about God. Theology is in need of a reference system, in need of a revelation which manifests itself in history within the human condition. The life of Jesus Christ, God within the human condition fully embracing it, becomes the meeting point between divine being and human being, between the incommensurability of human language for God-talk and its very possibility as appropriate and meaningful. This is the reason why all metaphorical language as an expression of being-addressed-by-God finds its root in the event of God himself becoming human. If the language of faith, and as a consequence theological utterances, do not want to take the name of God in vain, then their use of

[96] MT, 56. However this passive formulation of "lets itself be discovered" in connection with truth remains vague. In respect to the concept of revelation it is rather ambiguous. Cf. below part 2.3.
[97] MT, 62.
[98] MT, 68.

metaphorical language needs to be in continuous correlation with the event in which God addressed humanity in the most direct and concrete way.[99] Jüngel argues:

> Thus the event in which we are addressed in God's name is decisive for the proper formation of theological metaphors. That event is the event in which God once and for all came to the world and came to speech as the one who addresses us: the event of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the event of the justification of sinners. In this event free choice of theological metaphors has both its ground and its limits.[100]

At this point, however, one starts to wonder whether Jüngel does not too quickly reduce the *complex event* of God revealing himself in the life and death of Jesus (which is a narrative) to a *particular concept*, namely the incarnation. Moreover, what is the role of Old Testament language, obviously articulated before the incarnation took place? Given Jüngel's indebtedness to Ricoeur with his stress on language as discourse and the in-exhaustiveness of metaphorical language the problem appears to be more complex than Jüngel wants to concede. Although I do agree with him on the centrality of the incarnation as an argument against God's refusal of speech,[101] I do not concur with his one-sided dissolution of metaphorical truth into the Christ event for true speech about God. From a trinitarian perspective one might also want to ask where the Holy Spirit comes into the equation. This problem is not addressed.

> The Incarnation is God's refusal to avoid speaking, and so the Incarnation functions as a paradigm for the operation of theological language which both "does justice" to God's transcendence and infinity, but at the same time makes it possible to "speak." In other words, it is the Incarnation that provides an account which affirms both transcendence and immanent appearance – both alterity and identity – without reducing the one to the other.[102]

But what exactly does "incarnation" stand for? Which signification and interpretation of the Christ event should gain priority for the limitation of theological language about God? Given my account of experience and language, there is no single and straightforward answer to this question. What is the meaning of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection? Surely a Lutheran theologian will answer this question differently to a Roman Catholic, and Jüngel leaves no doubt that for him it is the doctrine of justification that provides the theological reference point. However, he does not give any reason as to why this should be so. Is he favouring the limitation of theological

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[99] In this incarnational context, biblical language as profoundly metaphorical and as deeply grounded in and correlated with the Christ-event also gains fundamental significance for Jüngel.
[100] MT, 64.
[101] Cf. Smith, *Speech and Theology*, 126: 'God's incarnational appearance is precisely a condescension to the condition of finite, created perceivers. How could he appear otherwise? The Incarnation signals a connection with transcendence which does not violate or reduce such transcendence, but neither does it leave it in a realm of utter alterity without appearance.'
[102] Ibid., 154.

language by doctrine rather than being inclined to open up new theological meaning by metaphorical language? The in-exhaustiveness of metaphorical language seems to be subordinated to a particular understanding of the incarnation. This displays not only a one-sidedness but, from a trinitarian perspective, leaves the question unanswered whether or not the Holy Spirit might initiate metaphorical utterances stemming from human experience which, although certainly not in contradiction to the Christ event, would expand our understanding of God's being from a different perspective.

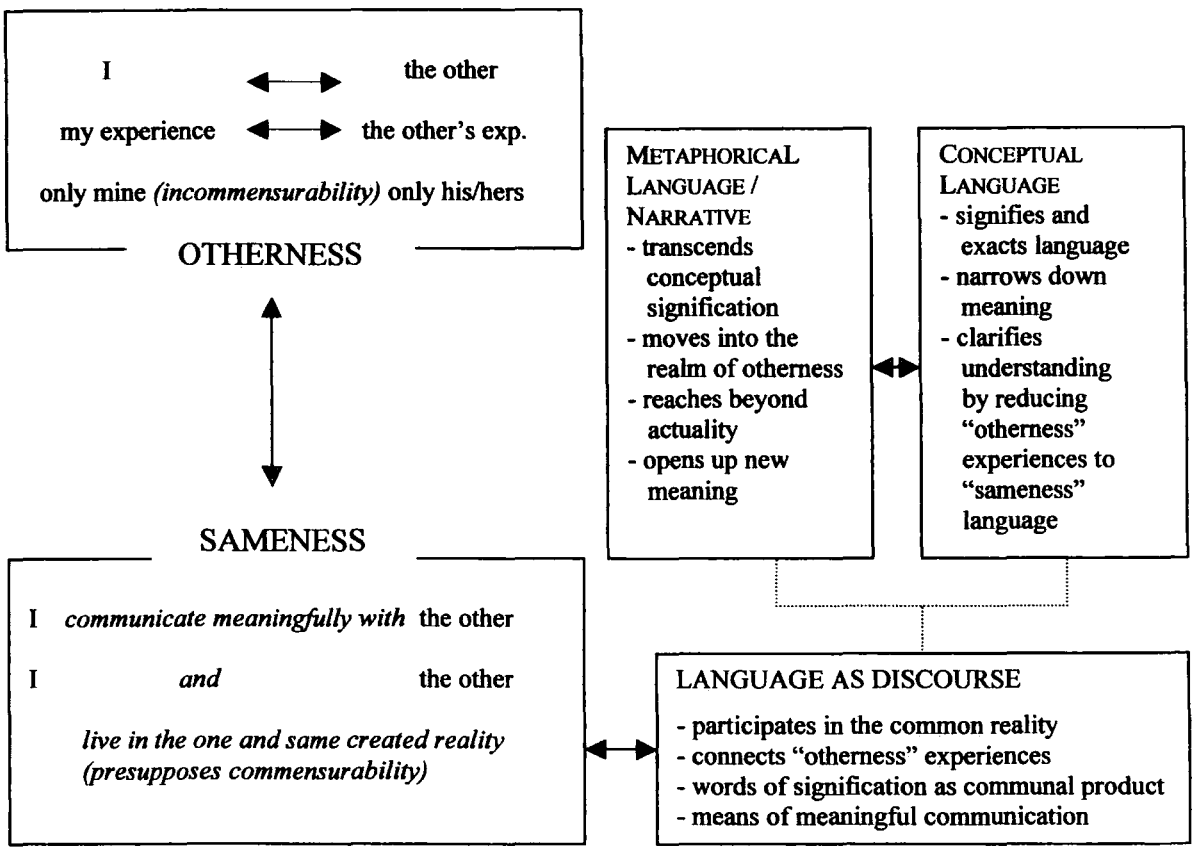
In conclusion then, on the one hand, I wholeheartedly agree with Jüngel's emphasis on the importance of the incarnation for theological discourse. On the other hand, however, one has to reach beyond Jüngel's account of metaphorical truth as a mere function of christology. The metaphorical process, embedded in the condition of experience and language, must not be conceived merely as a passive "letting itself be disclosed" but rather as a given possibility of the human condition to which God accommodates himself.[103] Otherwise we are again left with an account of truth in which revelation and experience are considered as opposed to one another. Jüngel, at this point, neglects a proper investigation into the relationship between experience and revelation. To this problem I will turn in the next part of this chapter. For the time being I must end on a preliminary conclusion. Metaphorical in-exhaustiveness in connection with the incarnation as a framework for theological language a) should manifest itself as a creative and open interaction of human experience with the whole range of Jesus narratives and testimonies rather than merely with christological concepts and b) must be sought for within a trinitarian framework that acknowledges God's presence in the Holy Spirit throughout the ages.

2.2.4 Conclusion

In this part I have tried to shed some light on the correlation between language, experience and truth from philosophical, linguistic, and theological perspectives. Investigating the relational dependency between experience and language in its pre-experiential and pre-linguistic condition of a given and relational reality it became imperative to ground human experience in the dialectic structure of otherness and sameness. As a result I concluded that language is an inherent part of experience and therefore cannot be opposed to experience as incommensurable. An appropriate attempt

[103] See below part 2.3.

of articulating truth, therefore, will most likely emerge out of a creative interaction between metaphorical and conceptual language.[104] The graph below might function as a summary.



Graph 1: Experience's sameness and otherness structure and its relation to language

Given this structure and interconnectedness between experience and language, as well as the premise that human beings actually do live in *one* world as our common point of reference rather than many, truth must be sought within this complexity. That is to say, concern for truth must be a concern for the articulation of reality which displays a richness that cannot be grasped by one concept or style. The dependence of conscious human beings on the dialectical structure of experience and language does therefore not discard the notion of truth but rather highlights the problem with language that it does not block 'all access to reality, but that it always falls short of a finally adequate

[104] Schleiermacher's discussion of the correlation between poetic-narrative language and dogmatic sentences is also very suggestive in this respect: *Der christliche Glaube (1830/31)*, §§ 16-18.

account.'[105] Theological integrity, to refer to the opening section of my discussion, and the search for true and meaningful interpretations of reality needs to admit that there is no such thing as a normative style or language. As Williams rightly emphasizes: 'The theologian needs to affirm theologically the propriety of different styles, and to maintain exchange and mutual critique between them.'[106] However, the search for truthful articulations of reality must also include non-theological styles of discourse. Jüngel and Schwöbel argued from a theological perspective that experience depends on the givenness of the creation as something which is constituted by God for the self-experiencing subject and that in theology and faith people try to express something which ultimately reaches beyond the actual of human experience. If this distinction has some validity, it implies the necessity for theological discourse to integrate without restriction the articulation of reality as human beings experience it. Hence, theological discourse about the doctrine of God as human speech, if it wants to be more sound and meaningful, has to integrate more thoroughly conversations with different fields of the human sciences as being part of the quest for true interpretation of our common reality. Otherwise it runs the risk of misleading one-sidedness with the consequence of not being able to give an appropriate account (despite all fragmentation) of how human beings still live in *one* world and *God-given reality*, which they all inhabit.

2.3 EXPERIENCE, INCARNATION, AND REVELATION

2.3.1 From experience to revelation

2.3.1.1 The otherness-sameness-structure as a key to speech about revelation

After having investigated the concept of human experience in relation to the concept of language I now would like to spin this thread a little further and extend it more specifically into the realm of God-talk and the possibility of speech about revelation. Assuming this *interstitial attitude*, the heading "from experience to revelation" must not be misunderstood as indicating experiential foundationalism. As noted earlier, the intention now is to search on the platform of human experience for traces of revelation which do not violate the human condition but still allow for a reasonable and meaningful interpretation of experience in terms of revelation without confusing the one

[105] Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, 74.
[106] *On Christian Theology*, 9.

with the other. To begin with, therefore, it is essential to bear in mind that the concept of experience led to a crucial distinction between two levels of reality. First, there is the level of reality that is *constituted for* the experiencing subject as the condition of the possibility for human experience. Second, there is the level of reality as being *subjectively* accessible by human beings from within, and as being part of, this given reality. Due to reality's fundamental openness towards human experience, this entails the fact that both levels are somehow connected and should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Given this distinction theological discourse when it appeals to revelation can be described as the attempt of reaching beyond the second level and of saying something about the ground of reality and consequently about the *telos* of the human condition and the created world in relation to God. This reaching beyond, that is genuine theological discourse, however, can only be ventured as human discourse if God somehow breaks through and enters the level of human experience. To speak of revelation includes the aspect of learning something from God about the first level of reality which human beings cannot objectively know by themselves. It is at this point that not only the indispensable role of the notion of revelation but also its proper context emerges for theology. Looking from the perspective of the previous part the notion of revelation should not and cannot be established as a warrant for objective truth. It therefore must be explicated in mutual dialogue with an account of human experience in its recognition of the reality of God as the ground of human reality. Christian theology when it speaks of God's presence in the world and subsequently of the possibility of knowing something about the transcendent God and his reality usually refers to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. However, when the Bible speaks of God revealing godself in various ways in history through the prophets, through the Son, or through the Holy Spirit,[107] this process of discerning what God actually reveals to human beings is deeply embedded in the conditions of human life. Truth about God and the relation between God and the world is found in the midst of human life as it is lived and theological discourse emerges mainly out of the primary experiences of charismatic leaders, prophets and Jesus' followers. Looking at the New Testament as a whole one can observe complex processes of different discourses and theological arguments used in order to discern the significance and truth about Jesus,[108] as well as the struggle not to

[107] John 14; Romans 8; Hebrew 1.1-2.

[108] Paul's first letter to the Corinthians might suffice as an example of diversity in the Christian community and its struggle to explicate the Gospel of Christ.

confuse the workings of the Holy Spirit with human spirits.[109] This analysis supports the fact that God's presence among his people in Jesus and through the Holy Spirit must be understood in a way that connects the concepts of experience and revelation. Consequently this approach seeks to focus on experience's hospitality towards revelation, claiming that experience and revelation are not hostile to or exclusive of one another.[110]

On the theological canvas, given reality's openness to experience and therefore a certain kind of overlap between God's objective reality and our human subjective perception of created reality, the otherness-sameness-structure of experience now emerges as a possible intersection between the two levels of reality. In regard to the possibility of divine revelation and human speech about God, it can be argued that the creative process of human experience fused with the inexhaustiveness of metaphorical language opens up space for God's otherness to appear within the realm of human sameness. In other words, the appearance of God's otherness within the confinements of human language renders possible theological discourse as meaningful and true interpretation of God's being. At the same time, however, it can and must also be maintained that this appearance within the sameness structure does not dissolve God's otherness into sameness. With regard to the human sphere and the given reality human beings inhabit, it was argued earlier that the sameness-essence of experience signifies the common reality of human being. In the case of relating the levels of divine and human being within the sameness-essence of experience, however, the notion of grace takes over. Theologically speaking, God remains the other and in this way is not a direct object of human investigation and observation. But because human reality is open towards God as the source of this reality, human experience and its embeddedness in language is not disconnected from God's reality. This connection has to be depicted as a connection sustained by grace and not as one of being. Otherwise it would be suggested that the created world is somehow an emanation of God's being and that therefore the appearance of God's otherness within human sameness grounds on the foundation of a common reality of being. What I suggest here is the view that because God willed in his freedom to create finite reality and to render possible the human condition as it is, the

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[109] 1 John 4.1.

[110] If Christian theology ventures to make claims about the universal validity of its central beliefs, then it has to show how they can be thought of as grounding in God's reality while at the same time not neglecting the indispensable function of human experience for all knowledge. Lash emphasises in a similar way theology's task 'to take with sufficient seriousness the function of human experience in the process of revelation, while at the time safeguarding the God-given nature of that revelation': *Change in Focus: A Study of Doctrinal Change and Continuity* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1981), 13.

only way to make sense of experience's meaningful participation in this given reality and its receptive possibility for divine revelation (and therefore its capability of reaching beyond subjectivity, particularity, and non-realism) is by way of contending that human experience *de facto* is capable of hosting God's appearances. This renders possible talk about revelation without confusing it with the concept of experience. Furthermore, it implies the possibility of theological discourse about both God's otherness appearing within the limits of the human condition and meaningful (and in this sense true) speech about God.

In order to give this claim some more substantial and "experiential" support it should be noticed that experience's hospitality towards the notion of revelation already displays a crucial aspect within Israel's God-talk in the Old Testament. The authors of the Old Testament are not really interested in conceptual language or in a clear-cut enterprise of attempting to define the ways in which God shows himself. It is rather the case that scriptural testimony not only refuses to provide a general term for "revelation"[111] but also urges theologians to speak of a plurality of concepts of revelation.[112] This refusal makes perfectly sense in the light of the previous discussion because the actual event of *experiencing* a divine encounter, or of having an experience of God's otherness within the human condition, can only be linguistically expressed within the sameness structure in order to gain meaning at all. Hence the Old Testament tends to narrate experiences, interpret reality through worship, and deliver "revealed truths" through the cultural-linguistic sameness structure of its time. People try to describe how God acts in their lives and how God reveals himself within the realm of human experience. The Old Testament therefore talks about Yahweh's word as an event in which human beings with their lives, acts, and thoughts form an integral part. Divine words are *happenings*. Theological truth, for Israel, is disclosed within experience and through interpretation.[113] Theological truth takes time to express and consequently includes the notions of development and process. Let me briefly mention one example, namely Israel's developing understanding of the concept of God itself. Initially expressed in a more open way, leaving room for the belief in the existence of other gods

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[111] Cf. Claus Westermann, *Theologie des Alten Testaments in Grundzügen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 19.

[112] Cf. James D.G. Dunn, 'Biblical Concepts of Revelation', in Paul Avis (ed.), *Divine Revelation* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1997), 1-22. According to Dunn we can speak of revelation in nature, in history, in the moral consciousness, in wisdom, through inspiration and prophecy, through visions and dreams, and of course in Jesus Christ.

[113] Cf. Chapter Four, part 4.1.

beside Yahweh, the concept of God was finally uttered in more monotheistic terms,[114] thereby expressing a universal and hence a more meaningful understanding of God's being.

This process is quite illuminating and illustrates both a vital aspect of experience's capacity for relating to theological truth within its sameness-otherness-structure and God's capacity to steer this process through the Spirit. Israel's process of coming to emphasise a monotheistic concept of God[115] highlights experience's possibility of reaching beyond the self-constituted reality of self-experiencing subjects. God's otherness and his reality as experienced by Israel through the centuries pushed – after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple – beyond the framework of cultural-linguistic sameness, that is the unquestioned belief in the existence of many gods.[116] Israel's creative process of experience in its recognition of God's reality as the ground for their existence pushed beyond the limits of human reality and self-created interpretation. Israel's embeddedness in the Babylonian cultural linguistic framework of that time as well as the common belief in the existence of different gods would rather suggest a different outcome of Israel's interpretation of its doctrine of God. However, in the light of Jerusalem's destruction and the exile experience, the actual development of Israel's doctrine of God resulting in the belief "Yahweh alone" exhibits a real novelty. This novelty opens up space for a pneumatological interpretation of revelation. Counter-intuitively Israel began to insist, although Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple – the most obvious sign of God's presence in Israel –, that there is only one God alone and that this God is called Yahweh. God made himself known to Israel as the *only* God, who is other and transcends the reality of the world, in the midst of all "sameness-objections", namely that God had obviously lost against the Babylonian gods and therefore should rather be seen as inferior to them. Belief in God alone as the only God at this moment in Israel's history (including a disillusioned view of human guilt) indicates that Israel's process of experience was capable of leaving space open for God's otherness, an otherness that, when seeking expression, could not be simply derived from the sameness features within the human condition. Believing in Yahweh gained a new quality and a true and meaningful expression of God-talk was born.

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[114] E.g. Genesis or Psalms 82; 86; 97 in contrast to Isaiah 44.6; 45.5.

[115] For an account of the development of monotheism in the Old Testament: H.D. Preuß, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Band 1 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1991), 124-32.

[116] Preuß concludes that Israel's development towards monotheism ultimately cannot be *derived* from other religions or cultural influences: *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 1:131. Cf. W.H. Schmidt, *Alttestamentlicher Glaube in seiner Geschichte* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 84. Schmidt discusses monolatristic tendencies in relation to the first commandment.

Theology from then on had to speak of the one and only God of Israel, creator of the world who, despite all particular experiences of suffering and despair, is and remains God with us. This example emphasises that experience itself is not hostile to the notion of revelation but rather provides the ground for expressing this development towards monotheism in meaningful terms without recourse to some canon of neutral accuracy. In this context it rather should be maintained that God revealing himself as the one and only God during the time of Second Isaiah finds a meaningful interpretation neither if one postulates that Israel merely developed this belief (alone or dependent on other influences) nor if one tries to safeguard God's freedom (independent of human interpretation) by recourse to some objectively revealed word. The notion of revelation, despite its indispensability, bursts any attempt of conceptual tidiness[117] and cautiously

[117] Regarding this one should be very cautious conceiving revelation too straightforwardly in terms of speech or communication. The problem of conceiving revelation as divine speech or divine self-communication in Jesus Christ is that we cannot escape the ambiguous analogy drawn from human communication. The problem one has to face is that what is valid for human communication cannot be transferred straightforwardly to religious experience because there is no objective possibility of identifying the divine sender of a received message within human experience. For a critique of the divine speech model see Pannenberg who holds that every religious experience, even when correlated with a concept of inspiration, cannot determine its own truth content and that every 'interpretation is always mediated by the context of the experience': *Systematic Theology*, 1:234.
Also some modern proposals that employ a concept of inspiration are not convincing because they seem to transfer the problem to a intermediary concept of inspiration, which then has to deal with the same epistemological problems. See especially W. Abraham who roots his concept of inspiration in a concept of what it is for one agent to inspire another: *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture*, esp. 63. With this model he does not overcome the in-congruency within the communication analogy. Similar problems occur in Frances Young's attempt in *The Art of Performance: Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990). Cf. also W. Klaiber and M. Marquardt, *Gelebte Gnade. Grundriß einer Theologie der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche* (Suttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus, 1993), 19-52.
Furthermore, one could argue that even within the realm of human communication the situation is much more complex than the communication model suggests. For human communication to be operative it always has to take place within a particular context (presupposing common experience and a relationship) and in a specific code (namely an intelligible language). This means that already for human communication we have to say that the communication of a particular content can only be conceived as a complex relational event in which the dimensions of language, common experience, and the surrounding world build integral parts of any revealing event. Even within human communication (where we know the sender of a message) there is no such thing as an objective message in the strict sense which would reveal objective truth from outside to us. For an illuminating discussion: Charles Davis, 'Revelation and Critical Theory', in Paul Avis (ed.), *Divine Revelation* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1997), 87-99.
Surprisingly it is still quite common in German protestant theology to construe revelation in analogy to human communication. Schwöbel, although he is aware of the problems, straightforwardly claims: 'The concept of revelation depicts revelation as the act of divine self-communication in which the triune God communicates himself through the medium of created reality as the ground and the author of creation, reconciliation and salvation of created being' (*God*, 86). Then he construes the formula 'A discloses in the situation B the content C for the recipient D with the result E' (*God*, 87). For a similar example: W. Härle, *Dogmatik*, 88. These proposals limit too soon the complex notion of revelation to the Christ-event and therefore fail to address the problem of the function of human experience. In order to show that God still speaks to human beings today, Schwöbel is urged to construe "faith" (as the result of revelation) as an ontological category. This is rather ambiguous because faith suddenly advances to the realm of epistemic priority, which does not solve the problem of deciding which beliefs or statements to hold true. As Marshall points out, 'the collapse of foundationalism surely does not mean that we may believe whatever we like, nor does it mean that we may choose our epistemic priorities at will': *Trinity and Truth*,

shows itself pneumatologically within the sameness-otherness-structure of human experience.[118]

In conclusion then, one might say that the otherness-sameness-structure of human experience displays the vehicle of the possibility to encounter God's reality in the human world. It is not only human experience's condition of *living within* this dialectic structure of sameness and otherness but also its conscious *capacity of relating* otherness to sameness, singularity to universality, or strangeness to familiarity that God talk becomes possible at all. It is precisely this structure of human experience which allows theology both to speak of real and meaningful experiences of divine encounter through the Holy Spirit (and consequently of revelation) and to take seriously the possibility of expressing such experiences in meaningful linguistic terms.

2.3.1.2 The divine other as the human other

The general line of this argument must now be extended and connected with and supported by an incarnational hermeneutics. Here a similar inseparable interaction between experience and revelation can be detected within the development of christology. Christianity's central belief in the divinity of the man Jesus[119] supports the conviction that human experience is capable of relating divine and created reality within the limitations of creaturely existence. Analogically, as argued above with regard to

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145. For a similar ambiguous notion where it is not clear which role faith plays in connection with human experience: E. Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 334-57. He contends that, on the one hand, the relationship between revelation and human speech has to be conceived as interpretation, but on the other, we simultaneously have to say that this process of interpretation is steered by disclosed knowledge through faith.

There is no revelation without experience. Consequently, when dealing with the notion of revelation one should be quite cautious because it does not signify a clear and indisputable concept but rather has to be seen in the light of the theologian's search for God's presence and involvement in the created world. As John Milbank notes: 'Revelation is not in any sense a layer added to reason. ... It is lodged in all the complex networks of human practices, and its boundaries are as messy as those of the Church itself': *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), 122.

[118] D. Brown also envisages an amicable encounter between the concepts of revelation and human experience when he concludes: 'As with it seems to me all religious experience it is a matter of God carrying the individual further along a path which he has already indicated some willingness to pursue. In other words, revelation must be treated like the question of grace in general, as demanding synergism, the full cooperation of both parties. In a word, without a free response, God wishes no revelation': *The Divine Trinity*, 74.

[119] This move within my interstitial methodology attempts to clarify the concepts of experience and revelation in a mutual dialogue. Especially on the background of subsection 2.2.1.2 it must be contended for epistemic reasons that no rational argument whatsoever would be possible if we were to abandon *all* beliefs held true. Cf. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth*, 144: 'It seems impossible that we could doubt all our beliefs at once, or even be prepared to doubt them all.' And with reference to Wittgenstein he continues: 'doubt is logically possible only against a background of beliefs held true, since doubt (or preparedness to doubt) requires reasons for doubting (or being prepared to), and giving reasons requires appeal to beliefs held true (that is, not doubted).'

monotheism, it can be conceded that the belief in Jesus as the Son of God evolved out of God's appearance within experience's structure of sameness and otherness. Looking from this perspective the reported experiences of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection within the New Testament exhibit an overlap of divine and human reality. Given the context of Jewish monotheism it was rather counter-intuitive for the early Christian communities to insist that, although they prayed to the Father and to the Son, they nevertheless were monotheists.[120] To make sense of such a claim human experience's dialectic structure appears to be indispensable. In regard to the reported experiences of the New Testament, encountering Jesus was a matter of familiarity and strangeness, of sameness and simultaneously of complete otherness. Despite so many "sameness objections" that Jesus was quite like them, merely the son of Joseph, and obviously a human being like everybody else, the notion of total otherness could not be abandoned.[121] The cultural-linguistic sameness-essence of first century Palestine would have rather suggested going down the line of Celsus, one of the first critics of Christianity. He argued: 'If these men worshipped no other God but one, perhaps they would have a valid argument against others. But in fact they worship to an extravagant degree this man who appeared recently, and yet think it is not inconsistent with monotheism if they also worship his servant.'[122] In comparison with the Old Testament example this displays an immense intensification of the dialectic of sameness and otherness and its openness to revelation. Early Christian theology spoke of Jesus' divinity, despite all particular sameness experiences of encountering Jesus as a human being, without abandoning belief in monotheism.[123] The result was the development of the doctrine of the incarnation with its confession to Jesus as true God and true human being, maintaining precisely a structure of otherness and sameness. This emphasises that human experience is not hostile to the notion of revelation but rather provides a fruitful ground for interpreting this development towards the doctrine of the incarnation in meaningful terms without recourse to some canon of neutral accuracy. The belief in Jesus as the Son of God (and hence the total divine other) finds a meaningful interpretation by saying that God's otherness as the true source of all reality entered

[120] Cf. Martin Soskice, in Rupert Shortt, *God's Advocates*, 39.
[121] Luke 4.22; 5.21; Matthew 11.3-5; 17.1-8; Jesus' εγω ειμι statements in John's Gospel.
[122] *Contra Celsum* VIII.12, quoted in Frances Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 33.
[123] Cf. Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 27-78.

experience's sameness essence of first century Jews through Jesus who related to them as the human other without being reduced to the sameness-essence of human reality.[124]

A particular case in point to support this conviction can be seen in the significance of the resurrection of Jesus as the starting point for New Testament proclamation and theology.[125] For the present purpose it shall suffice to highlight the fact that the belief in Jesus' divinity as the risen Lord was prompted and brought about by experiences of the risen Jesus, the stories of the empty tomb, and to some degree by a commonly held belief within late Second Temple Judaism in the resurrection of the dead as an eschatological act of God.[126] However, these experiences and theological presuppositions, despite their ground preparing significance, are not enough to account for the belief in Jesus' resurrection and subsequently his divinity. This is simply so because there were different and more probable options within the sameness-structure of experience which would have fitted much easier. As Dunn notes, first, 'there were other categories which one would expect to have appealed to the disciples' and, second, 'resurrection had a limited reference, that is, to what was expected to take place at the end of time, prior to final judgement.'[127] This rather indicates the inseparable dialectical structure between experience and revelation. On the one hand, Jesus' burial and the empty tomb as an event in history[128] and the experiences of Jesus as the risen one were necessary for revelation to take place in respect of Jesus' divinity. On the other hand, these circumstances alone cannot reasonably account for the belief in Jesus as the risen one.[129] Rather it has to be asserted that within the process of human experience 'it is the *unexpectedness* of the interpretation put upon the resurrection appearances which is so striking ... Appearances of Jesus which impacted on the witnesses as resurrection

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[124] The here proposed concept of experience is especially helpful once we connect the incarnation with accounts of atonement that must hold together particularity and universality. Cf. Vernon White, *Atonement and Incarnation: An Essay in Universalism and Particularity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[125] 'Jesu Auferweckung von den Toten hat zentrale Bedeutung für die urchristliche Verkündigung und Theologie. Sie ist der Ansatzpunkt für die Rezeption der vorösterlichen Geschichte und Botschaft Jesu, und sie ist die Grundlage für die gesamte nachösterliche Tradition, worauf alle Einzelthemen bezogen sind': Ferdinand Hahn, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Band 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 128.

[126] Hahn, *Theologie*, 1:128-31; J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 821-79.

[127] *Jesus Remembered*, 866.

[128] 'Thus general historical considerations already show that the proclamation of the news of Jesus' resurrection in Jerusalem, which had established the Christian community, is hardly understandable except under the assumption that Jesus' tomb was empty': Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 99.

[129] For an account why psychological explanations ultimately fail: Pannenberg, *Jesus*, 88-94.

appearances did not confirm to any known or current paradigm.'[130] Hence it can be said that the experiences of the risen Jesus by human beings in human modes of perception (most likely including visual and auditory elements) created a new reality. Resurrection received a new meaning and the disciples were able to augment their understanding of God, penetrating a little further into the realm of God's otherness.[131] Again, God revealing himself in the experiences of the risen Jesus finds a meaningful interpretation neither if one postulates that the disciples merely developed this belief (dependent on tradition or psychological processes) nor if one tries to safeguard God's freedom (independent of human interpretation) by recourse to some objectively revealed word proclaiming Jesus as the divine Lord.[132]

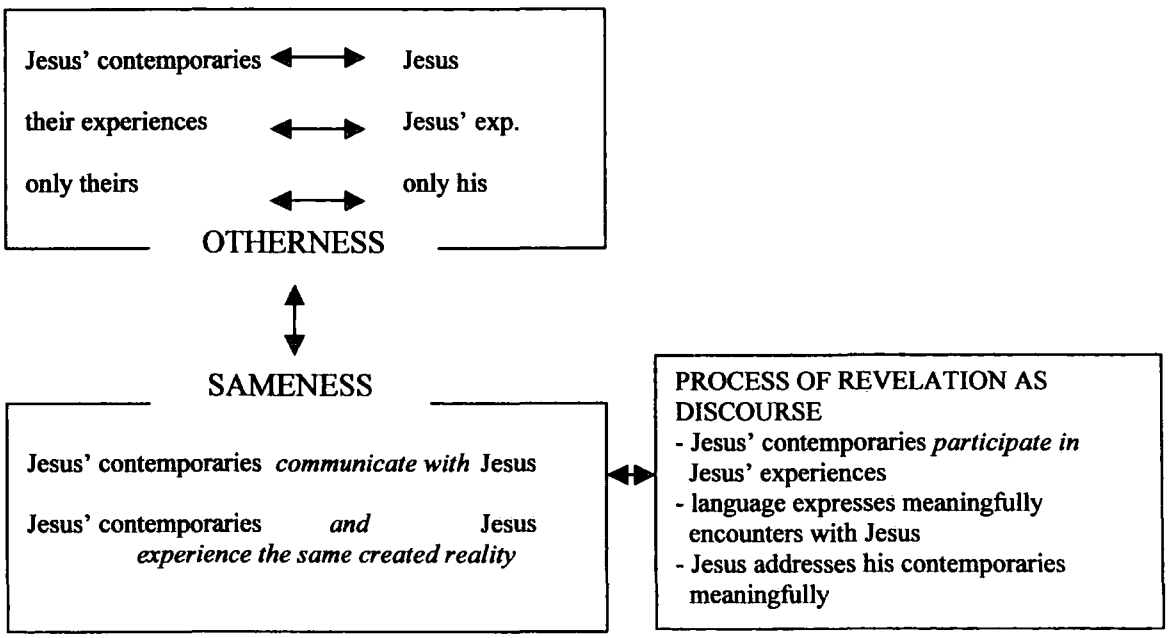
However, this appearance of God within the human condition does not equate divine being and human reality. It is essential at this point to recall that the concept of human experience maintains the notion of total otherness alongside the necessity for sameness. The sameness-essence of human experience had to be upheld in order to contend that human beings actually are able to communicate meaningfully. It was argued in connection with postliberalism and non-realism that any radical account of incommensurability would lock human beings up in different worlds. Nevertheless, the human other remains other in an irreducible way. This also suggests that already on the human canvas one has to speak of the sameness-essence as an expression which is linked to the concept of grace rather than being. The indispensability of the sameness-essence of human experience must be maintained but cannot be proved. The possibility of sameness – and therefore of a moderate but meaningful commensurability among human beings and different contexts – can be understood as grounding on God's grace, which sustains created reality as it is constituted for self-experiencing subjects. Jesus, therefore, shared human life with us on the grounds of experience's sameness-essence, enabling us to see God's otherness *meaningfully* through the eyes of human reality without being reduced to it. To coin the phrase "from experience to revelation" in this context then is a way of saying that through the process of first century Jews

[130] Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 874-5. Similar Pannenberg, *Jesus*, 92: 'The Easter appearances are not to be explained from the Easter faith of the disciples; rather, conversely, the Easter faith of the disciples is to be explained from the appearances.' Cf. also N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK,1996), 111.

[131] Cf. Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Band 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 168: 'Das neutestamentliche Auferstehungszeugnis vollzieht gegenüber der alttestamentlich-frühjüdischen Tradition einen kühnen Schritt... Dieses Bekenntnis der neutestamentlichen Zeugen ist analogielos.'

[132] Helpful is Hurtado's discussion of religious experience and religious innovation in the New Testament: *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 179-204.

experiencing Jesus God entered the sameness-essence of humanity and thus opened up a possibility for us to partly understand how and who God is in relation to humanity.



Graph 2: Experience, Incarnation, and Revelation

2.3.1.3 From incarnation to experience

The discussion so far is well on the way to exhibiting the proposed *interstitial methodology* which moves between experience and revelation in order to meaningfully interpret both. Taking now the doctrine of the incarnation more directly as a starting point this section attempts to give the argument some more imaginative strength from working the other way round, presupposing a belief as revealed and testing it against the concept of experience. For this purpose I would like to draw attention to some contemporary theologians arguing in favour of the Hegelian tradition. Touching briefly on this tradition I intend to sketch how the dialectical structure of otherness and sameness proposed here can also be detected in this tradition. This highlights the significance of the incarnation for theology as a connecting link between divine and human reality. To begin with it is imperative to recall Hegel's distinctive contribution to an incarnational hermeneutics because he clearly emphasised the problems for theology if it construes the doctrine of God in strict oppositional terms viewing divine and human

reality as exclusive and hostile to one another. Such strict polarization, he claimed, is not appropriate and not in agreement with the doctrine of the incarnation.

> 'The son of God is also son of man; the divine in a particular shape appears as a man. The connection of infinite and finite is of course a "holy mystery", because this connection is life itself. Reflective thinking, which partitions life, can distinguish it into infinite and finite, and then it is only the restriction, the finite regarded by itself, which affords the concept of man as opposed to the divine. But outside reflective thinking, and in truth, there is no such restriction.'[133]

Besides Hegel's aspiration after a total and all encompassing philosophical system, which led him to a speculative christology in which Christ in the end was sublated in his system of the absolute spirit,[134] he rightly observed that 'if the Infinite and the finite are thought of in a way that they are merely opposed to each other, then the Infinite is determined by the finite. The Infinite is limited by the finite if it is defined simply as that which is not finite.'[135] In other words, Hegel showed that the categorical distinction between God und human, between the Infinite and the finite, logically limited God's infinitude because it puts him in the *restricted* realm of 'not being finite' and 'other than human'. For Hegel, God had to be the one who is both finite and infinite. In virtue of that striking argument divine life and human life in the light of the humanity of Christ cannot be easily separated and opposed to each other because God's act of becoming a particular man in history is not something alien to his being, but it is in accordance with his being. 'In brief, according to Hegel, the true God is the one who is both finite and infinite, both God and man in unity.'[136]

Hans Küng, taking up Hegel's line of thought, developed some helpful prolegomena to an incarnational christology. Küng argues that if one takes the incarnation seriously, then it has to be contended that God *de facto* experienced human life. In connection with the suffering of Christ he says that 'God suffers in his Son – not intrinsically, but *de facto*; not simply as God in himself, but in the flesh. But *he himself* suffers in the Son, and the suffering in the flesh is his suffering.'[137] God freely willed to do so and in doing so embraced human experience in the life of Jesus. As a result, and without neglecting or playing down Hegel's compelling considerations that it is impossible to restrict God to the realm of "not-being-finite", the strong conviction

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[133] G.W.F. Hegel, quoted in Hans Küng, *The Incarnation of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), 111-2.
[134] See 'Begriff des Geistes', in G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke 10, Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981), 17-37.
[135] F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: B. Eerdmans, 2003), 24-5.
[136] Küng, *The Incarnation of God*, 434.
[137] Ibid., 446.

should be maintained that in the incarnation of Jesus Christ God remains godself and thus includes his own antithesis, the experience of nothingness and meaninglessness of human life within the realm of finitude.[138]

In a similar way, devising an epistemology of the theology of the cross, Jürgen Moltmann takes up these consequences and comes to the conclusion that without revelation in the opposite, the contradictions between divine and human despite their connectedness within Paul's doctrine of justification cannot be brought into correlation.[139] The cross of Jesus reveals God's deity. Thus he contends: 'It is the dialectical knowledge of God in his opposite which first brings heaven down to the earth of those who are abandoned by God, and opens heaven to the godless.'[140] The living Christian God is a God who includes the human condition. His incarnation does not indicate a deficiency in God's nature nor does it express a process of perfection within the divinity. 'In the genesis and kenosis involved in becoming man God neither loses nor gains himself, but rather confirms and reveals himself as the one who is.'[141] Consequently the being (*das Sein*) of Jesus and his humanity can be expressed as an event of God's self-correspondence or self-appropriateness.[142]

In line with these interpretations of the doctrine of the incarnation it is sound to maintain that, if God is truly the human other in the man Jesus, the experiences of first century Jews, who encountered Jesus and expressed their experiences in language, contain the actual possibility of revealing truth about God and the reality of our human condition. If God not only chose to become human but in doing so addressed human beings in Jesus on the ground of creaturely finitude without violating the concept of experience, then, experience itself becomes the fundamental base for theological reflection and the ground for theological truth. It is precisely with reference to this incarnational understanding of God that one should 'neither look down on images and

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[138] Brown highlights this dialectic in connection with John's Gospel: 'It is only by reading that Gospel as descriptive of something other than Jesus' humanity (either his divinity or our relation with that divinity) that we are really able to come to terms with its message. It was thus essential that Jesus should speak of things other than himself so long as he remained in this world. Paradoxically, God had to reveal himself by being other than God, just as Jesus had to speak of a kingdom of which he was not the king, for it to become plain that it was indeed his kingdom that was being revealed': *Tradition and Imagination*, 319.

[139] See especially his section on 'Revelation in Contradiction and Dialectical Knowledge': *The Crucified God*, 25-8.

[140] *The Crucified God*, 28.

[141] Küng, *The Incarnation of God*, 456.

[142] Cf. Jüngel who employs the phrase 'Das Sein Jesu Christi als Ereignis der Selbstentsprechung Gottes': *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung des Gottlosen als Zentrum des christlichen Glaubens* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 66.

symbols out of intellectual snobbery nor renounce concepts and ideas under the influence of agnosticism or mysticism.'[143]

The truth of the belief in the incarnation emerged out of the process of human experience to which God accommodated himself in the Spirit.[144] This process, continuously relating otherness to sameness, ultimately pushed beyond the common framework of human possibilities of intelligible interpretation and intuitive reasoning.[145] In conclusion, the doctrine of the incarnation has a two-fold significance. First, God himself assumes the human condition and therefore reveals to human beings that the otherness of finite existence can be meaningfully understood as forming a part of the divine life. Experience and language with its complexity of linguistic concepts as well as the multi-layered-ness of images, symbols and metaphors are not alien to his nature. '[I]f God wanted to identify completely with the human condition, he had to accept such characteristic human limitations, at least in so far as they came to expression in the humanity of Jesus.'[146] Secondly, the human condition, despite all its dependence on the concept of experience and the limitedness (including fallibility) of knowledge, becomes the actual possibility of theological knowledge.

This move "from incarnation to experience" then hints at some further implications. In connection with the discussion of the concept of experience I conceded that on epistemological grounds religious experience is in principle not separable from general human experience as a first hand or superior experience in order to gain knowledge of the reality of the world. Taking this into consideration I now want to propose an interpenetration and a mutual dependency of theology and anthropology or respectively of faith (or as some would say spiritual or religious knowledge) and mere human knowledge, embedded in the conditions of experience. There is no sharp demarcation line that could be drawn in order to exclude one aspect or the other. Human understanding of life and the reality of the world and subsequently our attempts to

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[143] Küng, *The Incarnation of God*, 464.

[144] John 14.26; 16.13; Romans 8.11.14; 1 Corinthians 12.3-11.

[145] When Stuhlmacher speaks about the Easter confession as a daring and bold (*wagemutig*) interpretation of experiences and observed facts (*Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments,* 1:169), then this displays a good circumscription of the here proposed sameness-otherness-structure of human experience. Furthermore, looking at the New Testament, Paul's reports about his experience of the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 9.1; 2 Corinthians 4.5-6; Galatians 1.12) can also be interpreted in this dialectic way. Stuhlmacher summarizes: '*Es ging also um einen von außen her an Paulus herangetragenen Erleuchtungs- und Erkenntnisvorgang: Der gekreuzigte Christus erschien Paulus als Träger der Herrlichkeit Gottes*' (1:173). In terms of the earlier discussion about language and truth, this is a good example of how metaphorical language is capable of pressing beyond itself in relating sameness to otherness and in such a way prepares the ground for God's revelation occurring within the realm of experience.

[146] Brown, *Tradition and Imagination*, 278.

conceive God as the all-encompassing reality is neither opposed to theology nor is it subordinated to theology. Rather it is the "always already there" point of our theological reflection, just in the same way as faith is the "always already there" point of our anthropological reflection. There is no theology without self-understanding; there is no elaboration of the doctrine of God without embeddedness in human experience with its anthropological assumptions and presuppositions of personhood, communion and the relationality of life.

An incarnational theology, which looks at the testimony of Jesus' life in the Gospels and the many stories of how Jesus encountered people and dealt with his contemporaries, acknowledges that the question of how and who God is and the question of what it means to be human is mediated by the experience of human life. The concept of religious experience within Jesus' day and age mainly depended on gradual perception through creative telling and retelling of experienced events and encounters with Jesus. These experiences with Jesus are to a large degree expressed in stories and narratives which in turn pay tribute to the variety and complexity of life. Hence an incarnational theology and the recorded testimony of how unconventional and always anew Jesus encountered people, can remind us of the fact that ordinary life is rather unsystematic and often confused. 'Life lived is not as life documented, and, though some systematizing is justified, as scholars seek order and intelligibility amidst complexity, it is unwise to impose an artificial order on human experience.'[147] Is it not precisely this complexity of life in which Jesus engages and talks about God's nearness and love that the doctrine of the incarnation not only makes sense to Christians but becomes the foundation of any relevant doctrine of God? The Bible speaks of the living God, the God who liberates the people of Israel, who is actively involved in the human search for justice and abundant life.[148] According to the Gospel of John, Jesus not only calls himself the bread of life but equates himself with life: "I am the life." Jesus wants people to receive full life, to realise their humanness, and to become whole and complete.[149] In order to make a real impact and to influence peoples' lives Jesus had to make their issues his issues and take part in their contextual interpretation of experience as the ground for all reality.[150] This then also indicates that Jesus' being-in-relation with

[147] Davies, *Anthropology and Theology*, 20.
[148] Cf. Chapter Four, part 4.2.
[149] Cf. Chapter Four, part 4.3.
[150] Cf. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 69: '[E]s ist nicht möglich, das Göttliche anders als vom Sinnlichen aus zu erkennen... Es ist möglich, vom Sinnlichen aus zum Göttlichen hinaufgeführt zu werden.'

his contemporaries does not only display a social reality of human life but, from a theological perspective, also points to an essential trait of divine life. In regard to the concept of revelation this also implies the importance of retelling or rereading biblical narratives in order to understand afresh, and hopefully anew in a revelatory sense, some truths of how and who God is in Jesus Christ.

However, it must not be forgotten that the relationship between God's and created reality is a relationship of grace rather than being. It is here where the notion of the Spirit emerged as indispensable for Christian theology. In using the phrase of "God accommodating himself to the framework of human experience" I now and then deliberately alluded to this circumstance. Hence I argued in connection with the examples of monotheism and the incarnation that an account of revelation within the framework of human experience is in need of pneumatology. In order to keep up a balanced view between revelation and experience without confusing the one with the other it is essential to claim that it is God-the-Spirit who accommodates himself to the thought framework of the dialectical sameness-otherness structure and brings about the possibility of real God encounters and revelatory experiences that reach beyond the human sameness structure. As a result of this discussion the claim of experience's hospitality towards revelation can be asserted. This affirms theology's indispensable task of including the different realms of human experience into its discourse and *listening to their possible truth-contents* before drawing final conclusions.

2.3.2 Revelation re-visited

2.3.2.1 Interpreted activity

The remaining task is now to give an account of how revelation or the presence of God in the world and our lives can be understood without violating two main conditions: firstly, that all human discourse and knowledge is inescapably bound up with human experience and language and, secondly, that retreat to an objective canon of supposedly neutral accuracy is not a viable option.[151] If my previous discussion "from experience to

[151] If revelation and experience are seen as opposed and hostile to each other, misleading inconsistencies incapable of holding together divine and human freedom will be the result. It is this complex and ambiguous relationship between revelation and experience which causes so much controversy within theological debates. On the one hand, if a theory of God's action is overemphasised without an appropriate link to the concept of experience one will unavoidably end up with a tendency towards revelatory positivism (i.e. direct verbal inspiration), which will most likely interpret revelation as some

revelation" bears some truth, then it seems obligatory to conceive of revelation as some kind of "interpreted activity"[152] or interactive dialogue between God and human beings attempting to make sense of divine otherness within experience's sameness essence.

It is commonplace nowadays to acknowledge that divine revelation can only intelligibly be spoken of if its content is *received* by human beings. Revelation as such can only take place if the process of human experience is constitutively involved in it. Schwöbel, for example, who describes revelation as a disclosure event, formulates: 'The disclosure event is directed, asymmetrical and irreflexive, but without the reception of God's self-communication one could not talk about revelation.'[153] The notion of revelation, therefore, indicates a complex event or process that takes place between God and human beings in which God discloses truth without violating the human condition. This interactive process becomes even more complex if one looks through the prism of the incarnation. Having addressed the significance of the incarnation in the previous section as a process of first century Jews experiencing Jesus, I mainly viewed the incarnation as *having occurred* within history and at a particular time. It now becomes indispensable to focus also on its significance *beyond a particular time*. This means that the central belief in Christ as the self-revelation of God confronts us with the difficult question of how this foundational story of Christ's life, death and resurrection at a particular place and time in history *is* and *remains* a possibility of revelation to occur. This obviously also entails the significance of the Bible as the testimony of this Christ-event, which is neither a sealed-off past occurrence nor can it simply be relegated to the realm of scripture. The Christ-event as a revelatory event is only accessible for us today within an open process of scriptural understanding and a development of tradition. In this context then theological discourse as the attempt to bring to speech what God reveals to human beings participates in a certain kind of hermeneutical spiral. This spiral not only depends on mutual human communication and interaction on the basis of

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kind of guaranteed divine speech with the emphasis on a doctrine of *sola scriptura*. For a critique of the misleading principle of *sola scriptura*: Frances Young, *The Art of Performance: Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture*, esp. 61-2. On the other hand, if the concept of experience is overstated as the ground for doing theology at all, one will probably stress the possibility of natural theology and end up with a tendency towards metaphysical discourse or an experiential positivism, which in turn will most likely lead to the neglect of a concept of revelation all together because a new *sola experientia* in line with the modern empirical sciences will be thought of as verifying all theological truth. On the equally unsatisfactory solutions of either "scripture alone", "tradition alone", or "today alone": Lash, *Change in Focus*, esp. 69-72.

[152] Lash, *Change in Focus*, 12: 'Revelation is thus "interpreted activity". That is, certain events are understood to be a "word of God" to man. Each of the three terms in that definition are of equal importance: *God*, certain *events* in human history, the *interpretation* of those events by human minds.'

[153] *God*, 92; see also Lash, *Change in Focus*, 13; Härle, *Dogmatik*, 88.

the process of experience but also, if it is to express divine revelation, is in need of a pneumatological foundation. To figure out what God speaks to us in Jesus Christ and through the Spirit not only points to theological concepts but also to worship and acts. 'Human beings,' as Nicholas Lash asserts, 'express themselves not only in what they say, but also in what they do: in gesture, habit, social structure, forms of worship, and so on.'[154] Any simple account of revelation must be avoided. A theological account of revelation has to consider how the basic process of experience is intertwined with claims about truth and speech about God.

2.3.2.2 Revelation as learning about learning

Given the complexity of the discussion so far revelation obviously does not lend itself to conceptual tidiness. The learning of a language, the interpretation of events of experience, and the interconnection of both must somehow play a role in any account of revelation. Rowan Williams, in his essay "Trinity and Revelation,"[155] takes up this line of thought and provides a helpful description of revelation as learning about learning. 'Theology, in short,' he claims, 'is perennially liable to be seduced by the prospect of bypassing the question of how it *learns* its own language.'[156] This statement points towards a similar process which I defined in line with Schwöbel as the process of experience. The phrase "learning about learning" then includes the complex interconnectedness between experience and language as well as the openness of this process towards new insights and new meaning about the human condition in relation to God. Revelation cannot express fixed propositions or feelings or certainties; it rather has to parallel the notion of faith, which signifies a "healing or live-giving project". Although Williams uses a different terminology, my account of experience as openness towards truth due to its otherness and sameness structure appears to have some parallels. 'Learning about learning,' he claims, 'is learning how we develop meaningful constructs out of historical process and decision: in other words, it is (or can be) equally a learning about *doing*.'[157] With reference to Ricoeur's idea of revelation, Williams argues that the process of learning opens up new questions rather than merely answering old ones. New horizons of meaning are opened up and new insights and new images can

[154] *Change in Focus*, 60.
[155] *On Christian Theology*, 131-47.
[156] Ibid., 131.
[157] Ibid., 132.

emerge, helping us to enhance meaning and understanding of our lives. Hence it is vital to stress that revelation is 'to do with what is generative in our experience – events or transactions in our language that break existing frames of reference and initiate new possibilities of life.'[158] The breaking of existing frames is not always a painless or linear matter of discourse. It rather indicates complexity, trial and error, and a continuing and partly controversial dialogue within the community of believers. This image of a generative process even evokes the notions of pain and suffering because it simultaneously implies the loss of something valued or even treasured. New meanings, especially when it comes to the notion of revelatory truth (expressing something new which ultimately grounds in divine action rather than human experience), can hardly always build upon old insights in an additive way. If new interpretations and meanings emerge in a way that they indicate a reaching beyond the existing thought framework of a community, old ones might not only be viewed as old but may be seen in a far stronger sense as wrong or at least misleading and harmful.[159] It is here that even the notion of heresy cannot *per se* be excluded from this process of learning.[160] The search for and the acknowledgement of truth within a community of believers therefore exhibits a complex and non-linear structure. Williams concludes with reference to R.L.Hart:

> "Revelation" embraces (a) that which incites the hermeneutical spiral and also (b) this "that which" taken into human understanding, the movement of the hermeneutical spiral itself' – or, ..., "revelation" includes, necessarily, "learning about learning". Any theology of revelation is committed to attending to event and interpretation together, to the generative point and to the debate generated. And, if this is a correct analysis, the model of revelation as a straightforward "lifting of the veil" by divine agency has to be treated with caution.[161]

Williams goes on to connect these insights with a trinitarian grammar, firstly, with the significance of Jesus Christ. In and through Jesus the early Christian community of believers found itself relating to God as Father in close intimacy and trust and took

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[158] Ibid., 134.

[159] One might think, for instance, of the Arian controversy and the development of the trinitarian doctrine of God.

[160] See also Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination,* 291. He argues 'that both within the Bible and beyond more often than not truth has emerged through lively disagreement, and not simply by formal acceptance of an existing deposit or simple deduction from it. The ability to envisage alternative scenarios has thus always been integral to the healthy development of the tradition. Unilinear theories of development must therefore be abandoned, and the search for consensus within conflict be taken with much more seriousness, whether we are thinking of later Church history or even the Bible itself.' Cf. Lash, *Focus in Change,* 62. He describes this unlinear process of generative experience with the terms of revolution and evolution.

[161] *On Christian Theology,* 135.

cognizance of itself as open to all with a global vision.[162] The story of Jesus became the new generative power and quality of life because it reached beyond the particularity of a cult, a group, or a nation. The generative power of the resurrection, transcending all local and temporal limitations, generated a new understanding of being human in relation to God the Abba-Father whom Jesus proclaimed. 'Putting the point another way: the Christian community has a focus for its identity in Jesus, yet the "limits" set by Jesus are as wide as the human race itself. The Christian "community" is potentially the whole world: Jesus offers new possibilities for the form of human life as such, not merely for a particular group to find an identity.'[163] This entails that despite the universality of the Christ-event it remains a particular one in human history. Hence the revelatory character of Jesus cannot be applied by human beings to their own temporal and cultural-linguistic framework in an absolute way. From this it follows that the revelatory character of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection displays an "initiation of debate at an unprecedentedly comprehensive level" (Williams) rather than a lifting of a veil. Revelation and therefore the attempt to spell out how and who God is in relation to human beings expresses a hermeneutical spiral. Because life continues, contexts change, human experience progresses, the foundational story of Jesus has to be re-conceived again and again. However, if this learning about learning through the ages and this hermeneutical spiral, which tries to relate to God's given reality in Jesus, wants to reach beyond mere human knowing, it is in need of pneumatology as an expression of God sustaining and steering this learning.

This leads Williams to the notion of the spirit as indispensable for any account of revelation. Human imagination, interpretation, and the acting out of Jesus' life, death and resurrection in worship and within theological discourse will only bear a revelatory character if generative power is also ascribed to the whole process. Only if we are able to say that the community's learning and re-learning, the interpretation of itself by means of Jesus through the ages, is part of God's generative power, only then can we properly speak of revelation.[164] This underlines from a different angle the same insight as expressed earlier that without conscious *reception* one cannot speak intelligibly of revelation or a disclosure event. It is precisely here where the notion of the spirit in connection with the notion of grace is indispensable. The central scriptural notions of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling of God within his people supports

[162] Ibid., 137.
[163] Ibid., 137-8.
[164] Ibid., 140-1.

the fact that any *real* and *truthful* interpretation of the generative power of the Christ-event cannot be reduced to mere human act. God the Spirit's generative power which is responsible for the revelatory possibility of the church's "learning about learning" and which sustains the hermeneutical spiral 'is not reducible to a human recollecting of Jesus; it is rather the process of continuing participation in the foundational event – the forming of Christ in the corporate and individual life of believers.'[165]

To push the implications a little further, we can now assume that it is precisely through the concept of human experience in its process of relating sameness to otherness that it can intelligibly be said that God reveals himself. With respect to the incarnation it can be argued that God encounters human beings in the human person Jesus and does so by simultaneously accommodating himself in the Spirit to the framework of experience and thus renders possible without violating the human condition the disclosure of truth. This can be depicted as a process of grace highlighting the fact that this process of meaningfully reaching beyond mere human reality ultimately is an act of God's grace rather than self-produced by human experience. In virtue of this it can be contended that the concept of experience supports the view that revelation has to be conceived in a trinitarian manner – through Jesus Christ and the Spirit together – and that the structure of revelation can be understood as a hermeneutical spiral.[166] Revelation must not be confused with absolute knowledge. Linking Williams' thought with Schwöbel's distinction between the two levels of reality, it is possible to view the Christ-event as God's trinitarian reality which is given to human beings in history and is therefore open to the experience of human subjects. This reality is not objectively accessible for human beings as absolute knowledge or as some kind of foundationalist neutral source of accuracy. But due to the overlap of objective reality and the subjective experience of this reality by human beings, as well as the indwelling of God the Spirit in this process, it is not only possible but imperative to say that revelation indeed does takes place.

Looking through the prism of the first half of this chapter, the complexity of the present concern can also be stated in the following way. The universal truth of God's intended reality of creation as well as God's own reality in the kenosis of Jesus Christ is only subjectively and individually accessible for human beings as a *meaningful* interpretation of reality because it occurred in history within time and a particular cultural-linguistic framework. A timeless truth would in fact cease to be relevant for

[165] Ibid., 141.
[166] Ibid., 142.

human beings for it would bypass the process of experience. No reasonable and thus meaningful interpretation of this transcendent reality would be possible. This entails that the notion of truth for self-experiencing individuals subject to failure and distortion always remains one of fragmentation. However, this does not entail abandonment of the notion of truth, and it does not discard the possibility of revelation. This contention, in Williams' words, might be summarized as follows:

> The claims of our foundational story to universal relevance and significance mean that it must constantly be shown to be "at home" with all the varying enterprises of giving meaning to the human condition. Thus the "hermeneutical spiral" never reaches a plateau. For the event of Christ to be authentically revelatory, it must be capable of both "fitting" and "extending" any human circumstance.[167]

The two terms "fitting" and "extending" highlight the fact that in order for revelation to occur as a new and God-given insight into reality it cannot completely burst the framework of human experience and language. Otherwise it would be meaningless. However, I am not so sure whether the phrase "never reaches a plateau" is a helpful one. Although Williams probably understands it as opposed to foundationalist claims it can also easily suggest that neither the "generative power of the Christ-story" nor the "learning about learning through the ages" within the community of believers provide us with some kind of meaningful and truly tentative plateaus. Be it as it may, most importantly it is essential to emphasize that for revelation to occur or for truth to be found it must be at home with all the varying enterprises of giving meaning to the human condition.[168]

2.3.2.3 Revelation in need of a trinitarian framework

What I have suggested so far is that what God reveals about godself and the human condition is always mediated by human experience. From a phenomenological perspective it can even be said that revelation is interpreted experience whose relevance is asserted and, should the occasion arise, is recognized and accepted.[169] This emphasizes the dialectic between the individual process of experience and its

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[167] Ibid., 142.

[168] Some theologians emphasise that theology would succumb to self-deception if it would neglect its creaturely embeddedness and its historical and cultural conditioning. See Küng, *The Incarnation of God*, 1; Pannenberg, *Anthropologie in theologischer Perspektive*, 15-6. Helpful is also Caroline Schröder's assessment of the interrelationship between story, doctrine and revelation in her article 'The Productive Vagueness of an Untranslatable Relationship', in G. Sauter and J. Barton (eds.), *Revelation and Story* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 175-87.

[169] Hans-Martin Barth, *Dogmatik. Evangelischer Glaube im Kontext der Weltreligionen* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser / Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001), 155.

interpretation of a single subject and the communal framework of beliefs, interpretations and language games.[170]

What part do they play within this account of revelation and how do they mutually depend upon one another? Since there is no such thing as private language and since interpretation always depends on a common interpretative framework, individual experience cannot be disconnected from the wider community. However, the individual experience of self-experiencing subjects cannot be reduced to the interpretative framework. This is why one still has to speak of *self*-experience and *subjective* experience. Neither the individual nor the group can be dissolved in the other. If, especially within the biblical and Christian tradition, people talk about personal God-encounters and revelatory experiences (for example within the prophetic tradition) they obviously include the notion of some sort of *new* received insight, which neither can be derived from the interpretative framework nor from the individual experience as a human act.

Having this in mind, how then do individual experiences and communal beliefs interconnect? On the one hand, looking through the lens of particularity, a revelatory experience is a subjective experience under the circumstances of a specific situation of an individual. On the other hand, however, to call a belief or a proposition a revealed truth, signifying at least in proximity God's will, such a belief must leave the realm of subjectivity and particularity and proceed to universal significance. A true belief or a revealed truth-content is something which is not only valid for an individual but for the whole community. Therefore, if the process of revelation, which takes its starting point at the level of subjective experience, shall grow towards a revealed truth-content, valid for the wider community of believers, then this revelatory process must include as a constituent part the process of drawing implications.[171]

In view of this, revelation can be conceived as a *process* in which God discloses himself. If it can be assumed that God communicates with us in whatsoever way without violating the human condition, then initially all one has to do is to 'acknowledge the necessity of divine accommodation to the thought framework of the

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[170] The importance of the embeddedness of human being-ness (*menschliches Sein*) in a community of people and therefore a tradition of understanding is well expressed in the notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Gadamer reminds us that in all understanding, if we are aware of it or not, *Wirkungsgeschichte* influences and determines the interpretation of our experience: *Wahrheit und Methode*, 284-90.

[171] Hans-Martin Barth, *Dogmatik*, 160-1, speaks of the unavoidability of syncretistic processes within the Christian confession to the revelation of God in the history of Israel and in the person of Jesus Christ. Statements and confessions which were articulated as revelation always underwent a process of inclusion and exclusion of beliefs and "materials" found in other religions and folk traditions.

hearer'[172] which depends on the concept of experience. In order that God can make himself known he has to adapt human possibilities of knowledge and perception. The incarnation is a case in point which can make us sensible to this divine structure of accommodation. It suggests that it is essential for God to assume the human condition in Jesus Christ and in this way to expose himself to a particular situation in history within a specific cultural environment and thought framework. Is it not precisely in this way that God takes us seriously as human beings without violating our freedom and our possibility to respond freely? Regarding this it seems to be conceptually sufficient for a concept of revelation to interpret God's accommodation to the human condition within the framework of a doctrine of creation (God as the creator of the possibility of experience and the giver of the disclosedness of created reality) pneumatologically and describe God's involvement as the source or the cause of certain experiences that can develop into true beliefs or revealed truths which transcend the realm of subjectivity and particularity. With such an understanding it is possible to conceive God as the source of a revelatory process without having to lay bare any particular words as divine speech. The contents of revealed truths of a believing community, consequently, can be understood as divine revelation mediated by human experience and the possibility of transcending these experiences in the awareness that God wants to make himself known within the human condition.[173] Such a model is also more in accord with both the biblical "*dabar*-concept", in which the response of Israel and the human being is an integrated part of God's word-event, and the Gospel narratives, which give testimony to the fact that people gained new knowledge of God through an experienced encounter with Jesus.[174] Finally, if the moral argument is taken into consideration that any concept of revelation should not violate human freedom but be at home with all the varying enterprises of giving meaning to the human condition the understanding of revelation must be consistent with the notion of free human response. Only if individuals can accept for themselves a particular belief as true will they be able to signify a message or an event as revealed.[175] But this in turn means: individuals have to be able to interpret this belief within their processes of experience as meaningful.

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[172] Brown, *The Divine Trinity*, 57.

[173] For a description of revelation as divine dialogue: Brown, *ibid.*, 70. '[R]evelation is a process whereby God progressively unveils the truth about himself and his purposes to a community of believers, but always in such a manner that their freedom of response is respected.'

[174] Cf. Chapter Four.

[175] Cf. Brown, *ibid.*, 74: 'As with it seems to me all religious experience it is a matter of God carrying the individual further along a path which he has already indicated some willingness to pursue. In other words,

To return full circle to the starting point of the argument it can be claimed that such an understanding of revelation and the appreciation of human experience as the location where God makes himself known is not only consistent with but rather in need of a trinitarian concept of God. While much of the traditional concept of revelation as divine speech (with its one-sided emphasis on the biblical word) reduced theological discourse about revelation to christology, a trinitarian understanding of God exhibits the importance of the doctrines of creation and of the Holy Spirit and therefore takes the human condition seriously. If one believes that God is still at work, that God as Spirit is among his people, and if one believes that God is still a being-in-becoming[176] because his story with his creation is moving on, then God's speaking to human beings (moving their lives and enabling them to receive new insights) *is* a revelatory act mediated by the Spirit and embedded in human experience which can advance their understanding of his love and being. Hans-Martin Barth expresses this insight in the following terms:

> Revelation is being executed as the mutual collaboration of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: Conditions of the creation (the dependency on human possibilities of communication and receiving knowledge), the historical testimony of Jesus as the Christ, and present-day experiences through the Spirit (who has to make relevant the historical testimony within one's own creaturely constitution), must be effective at the same time in order for "revelation" to occur. [177]

This trinitarian understanding expresses the fundamental belief that the God in whom Christians believe as the source of revelation is also the creator, reconciler and perfecter of the world and human life. Hence the possibility of human experience as the capacity of human beings to perceive, interpret, and understand the *reality* of the world and human life, can be made intelligible more appropriately if a trinitarian framework is presupposed. In this sense the concept of revelation is at the same time an explication of the possibility of human experience. The very fact of the disclosedness of created reality and the possibility for human beings to experience the world has to be understood already as an act of God.[178]

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revelation must be treated like the question of grace in general, as demanding synergism, the full cooperation of both parties. In a word, without a free response, God wishes no revelation.'

[176] Cf. Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being Is in Becoming* (Edinburgh: R. & R. Clark, 1976), 108: 'In the death of Jesus Christ God's "Yes", which constitutes all being, exposed itself to the "No" of nothing. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ this "Yes" prevailed over the "No" of the nothing. And precisely with this victory it was graciously settled why there is being at all, and not rather nothing.'

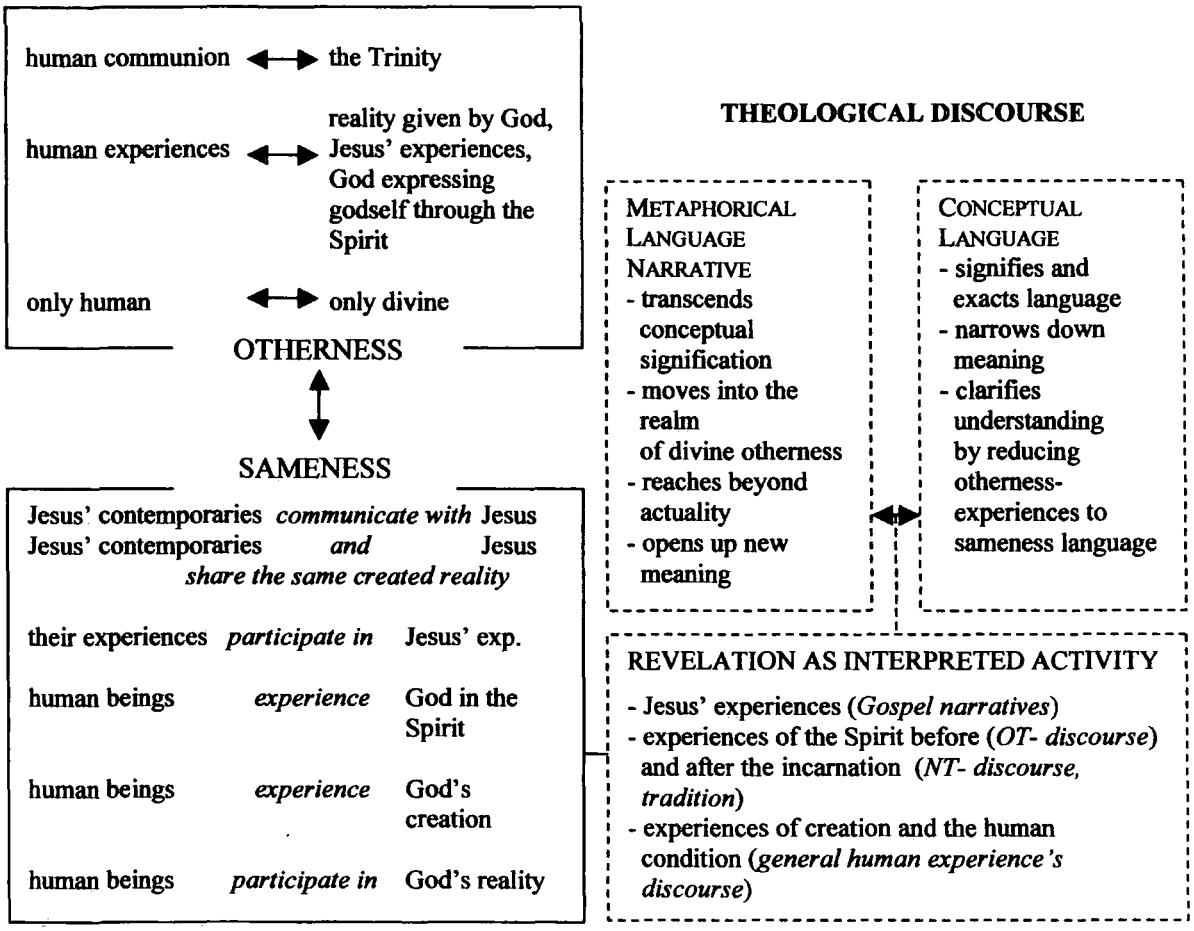
[177] *Dogmatik*, 154. [My translation.]

[178] Schwöbel, *God*, 118.

2.3.3 Conclusion

In this second part I have explicated the concept of revelation on the ground that God makes himself known through experience in a process which includes reflection and interpretation and is in need of the community of believers. If revelation is understood in this way then it does not specify a special realm alongside experience but rather the base as its possibility and as the possibility of its truth. This entails that initially there can be no epistemological privilege of some forms of experience over others. Human experience in general, as the ground for all knowledge, has to be brought into a creative correlation with religious experience including the experiences of the past. This process is executed as a communitarian theological hermeneutics and it must exhibit a mutual dialogue and a continuous interaction between scripture, tradition, reason and experience. Within such a process, where already held beliefs are valued but left open for God to act anew and brought into correlation with human experience, God will most likely be part of this process and be able to accommodate himself in the Spirit to our human thought framework and open up new meanings and enhance our understanding of him and the human reality. Theological truth and revealed understanding of creaturely reality and God's being will therefore most likely find true and appropriate expression within human language if our theological reflections are rooted in such a process.[179] To put matters in a nutshell, if the concepts of revelation and experience are seen in this light, then the human condition as God's good creation, Jesus as the incarnation of God, and the Spirit as God's liberating creativity, not only enable but rather urge us to embrace and include human experience from the broad field of the human sciences into theological discourse. The graph below might function as a useful summary.

[179] For an illuminating discussion of the complexity of revelatory truth and the criteria which might be applied by the community of believers: Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 384-406. Brown distinguishes between nine criteria: historical, empirical, conceptual, moral, continuity, christological, degree of imaginative engagement, effectiveness of analogical construct, and ecclesial.

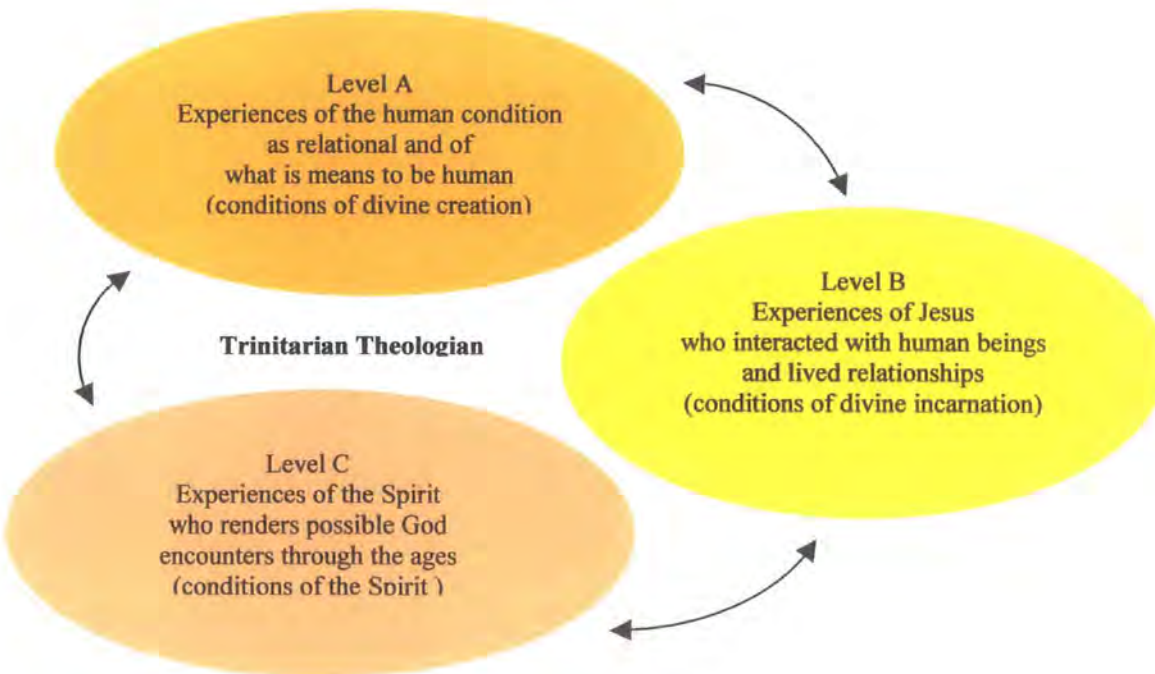


Graph3: Experience, Trinity, and Revelation

2.4 TRINITARIAN HERMENEUTICS IN THE INTERSTICE

On our journey towards a new account of the doctrine of the Trinity we have reached a first significant signpost. It suggests unmistakably that if trinitarian theology is to deliver on its intention to say something true about God and the human condition without being accused of reductionism or irrelevance, it has to engage in a more creative interaction with human experience as the possibility for interpreting reality and the nature of being *as it is given by God.* To anticipate any misconception this does not mean that a general account of human experience (in a foundationalist manner) slips back in again through the back door. Any objection suggesting this misses the point that

it is not a general account of experience that gains authority[180] but rather the generative process of "learning about learning", the hermeneutical spiral, within the community of believers. It is most important to emphasize that for revelation to occur or for truth to be found it must be *at home with all the varying enterprises* of giving meaning to the human condition. This then points to a crucial corollary. If trinitarian theology wants to say something about how and who God is as a *being-in-communion* and *in relation to the human condition* without confusing otherness with sameness it is in need of an account of the human condition. Only then, when one attempts to give a reasonable and appropriate picture of what it means to be human and what human relationality entails can one reasonably talk about both God's "communitarian" otherness and the correlation between divine and human sociality. Otherwise any endeavour to draw practical implications for human life will most likely tend to be either utopian (confusing divine and human reality and thus overloading and overburdening the possibilities of human communion) or too one-sided (simply favouring one's own social agenda). Theological discourse about the social doctrine of the Trinity, therefore, must be at home with all three levels of human experience and uphold a creative tension between them and move in the interstices.



Graph 4: Trinitarian hermeneutics in the interstice

[180] Such an account could not be developed. Any objector should be reminded of the crucial claim that there is no pre-linguistic experience as such and that it is misleading to speak of pre-theoretical experience in opposition to language and the concept.

While level A highlights the necessity of including an account of the human condition as relational and social, levels B and C draw attention to the importance of the Gospel narratives in particular but also of the Bible as a whole and of the tradition. Especially discourse on level A will help us to say in what way certain concepts apply to the human condition and in what ways they simultaneously might also be meaningful descriptions of the triune God. In order to determine, for instance, in which way experiences of Jesus or of the Spirit might reveal true and meaningful interpretations of the social Trinity we need to be able to explain both their divine otherness and their human sameness. Talk about the Trinity as a divine communion that is different from human communion (maintaining God's otherness) but at the same time similar to and reflected in the human condition, therefore, will only be theologically meaningful (and in this way hopefully suggestive and helpful for drawing out practical implications) if trinitarian discourse is developed as an interstitial theology. Otherwise any discourse about God's social being will remain in metaphysical captivity without any adequate link to human live as it is lived, and thus again effectively stress God's incomprehensibility in such a way that it easily becomes meaningless.

Following the conclusions of this chapter the remaining discussion of this thesis will be pursued in the following ordering. In Chapter Three my aim will be to address experiences of the human condition (level A) and to give an account of what it means to be human. This will lead to a description of human relationality and sociality. Chapter Four will focus on experience as it comes to speech within the biblical narratives. This will allow me to give an account of how and who the triune God is from the perspective of level B and C. Given the understanding of experience, language, and truth in this chapter, the outcome will be a tentative description of trinitarian trajectories. Taking up again the dialogue with contemporary trinitarian theology (including a conversation with tradition), I will be able to develop a more fully interstitial theology in Chapter Five. Drawing on the insights of Chapter Three and Four my aim is to propose an account of the Trinity in connection and in mutual dialogue with human life. Proceeding in this way the rationale "from experience to revelation" is applied to theological discourse. The outcome, it is my conviction, will be a creative re-reading of the doctrine of the Trinity with reference to some crucial notions of lived experience. Such a reading will provide better grounds for any subsequent theological discourse that wants not only to draw practical implications for human life but also to disclose distortions of life within our society and exercise some kind of social critique.

CHAPTER THREE

WHAT IT IS TO BE HUMAN

3

WHAT IT IS TO BE HUMAN

3.1 INTRODUCTION: NARRATIVE AND CONCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE

In this chapter my main concern is to focus on some proposals from general human experience and the human sciences in order to display some essential traits of what it means to be human. Such an anthropological endeavour is an indispensable task if the concept of God and human experience are to be brought into a fecund correlation.[1] But before commencing this investigation, what I would like to do first is draw attention to some important preliminary explanations in order to highlight my main concerns and the rationale behind the ordering of the following parts of this chapter.

To inquire into the understanding of what it is to be human can be a boundless enterprise. Limitation, a clear focus, and the disclosure of the starting point are indispensable for any reasonable contribution. Not only the huge number of different fields of research within the academic community demands this direction but also the fact of cultural and ethnic multiplicity around the world which forbids any hasty conclusion towards universality. To give an answer to the question of what it means to be human can only be understood as a contribution from a particular perspective bound to a specific cultural, religious, and philosophical framework. Saying this, it is not my intention to relativize my findings and underestimate their validity, but rather to state my own awareness of contextuality. Accordingly, my aim is not to present anthropological concepts around the world and compare them with each other in order to deduce some common characteristics which then could be described as the essentials of being human. Such a comparative method always entails the notion of cultural relativity that tends to violate 'language games' of other cultural contexts.[2] Rather, as a Christian theologian living in Europe, I would like to contribute some insights from "western" human experience and scientific research to open up new correlations between the human sciences and Christian theology in this context. However, it must

[1] Interestingly theologians who address the relationship between science and theology come to a similar conclusion. Because Christian theology treats the world not as opposed to God it must, 'by its very nature, be concerned with what can be known of creaturely reality on the basis of other disciplines': Paul Murray, 'Truth and Reason in Science and Theology: Points of Tension, Correlation and Compatibility', in C. Southgate (ed.), *God, Humanity and the Cosmos* (London: T. & T. Clark International, 2005), 112.
[2] Cf. D. Davies, *Anthropology and Theology*, 3.

also be remembered that despite all awareness of contextuality a strong assertion of incommensurability had to be rejected in Chapter Two. Therefore, what I propose at the end of this chapter is an account of some features of what it is to be human (albeit fragmented) that claims to transcend particularity and contextuality.[3]

I begin then by considering that an investigation of what it means to be human, initially, is not so much a task for reasoning and conceptualising but rather a matter of observing and interpreting life and human relationships. Scientific conceptions and daily human experience mutually have to illuminate the fundamental traits of being human. The conclusions drawn by the human sciences have to be grounded in life experience, which usually comes to expression in narratives.[4] People tell stories in order to communicate what they experience. This complexity I would like to call the dialectic between narrative and conceptual description. It suggests a twofold approach, first, to inquire into human personhood from a non-scientific and, secondly, from a scientific perspective. The term *non-scientific* simply indicates general human experience resulting from observations and conclusions drawn from outside the academic research community (the narratives), while the term *scientific* refers to concepts and frameworks provided by specific fields of the human sciences.[5] This obviously poses the question of how one can come across "general human experience" and examine it within an academic discourse.

This concern leads me to the distinctive feature of the first part (3.2). The question at hand made me aware of the realm of literature and the importance of stories for the understanding of human life. It led me to the venture of integrating a survey of modern novels into this inquiry. Stories reflect on life in its various levels and relations. Novels are being read not simply because people like reading but because they express common experiences in which readers can reflect their own reality. Human life always transcends concepts and is in need of stories that give meaning to life. Human life unfolds itself in stories in which fiction and reality cannot be separated from one another. Moreover,

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[3] To test such an account on the grounds of other cultural contexts is neither part of the scope of this thesis nor is it necessary since such a test could only be pursued as an inter-cultural discourse.

[4] This dialectic is also reflected in theology: Ritschl, *The Logic of Theology*. '*Stories can express things for which other idioms would be inappropriate. In particular the identity of an individual or a group can be articulated by stories. People are what they tell of themselves (or what is told to them) in their story and what they make of this story*' (p. 19). At the same time one must say: 'A conceptually complex theology is necessary for situations which must be made clear and relevant over against the biblical offer of life. Complex family, social, political, ethical, psychological and philosophical data and problems cannot be explained and solved by the simple narration of biblical stories or by the recitation of central statements from tradition' (p.27).

[5] This reflects my discussion of the relationship between metaphorical and conceptual language: Chapter Two, section 2.2.3.

human beings always do fictionalise people in encounters because they "read" them as persons of this or that sort.[6] Novels are thus capable of contributing insights from common life experience, which should not be neglected in such an investigation. This is valid not only because human experience can never be totally conceptualised but also because human thought cannot be reduced to academic reasoning that neglects the importance of imagination and the richness of story telling. Although this survey can only be a limited one, it has to be ventured. If the process of choosing books and their subsequent interpretation is pursued and carried out from the wider perspective of life experience, then such a contribution is as much justifiable as is any other from a psychological or philosophical perspective. Furthermore, a survey of a confined number of bestseller novels as the source of investigation enables me to draw conclusions and correlate them with findings drawn from scientific concepts. Such an attempt displays a novelty in theology but has to be taken seriously if one wants to draw more attention to human experience from outside the academic research community.[7] In this part, therefore, my intention will be to interpret some salient features of contemporary novels and in doing so highlight major traits of human personhood.

After having completed this task, my aim then will be to turn to the other end of the above-mentioned dialectic, namely, to conceptualised experience within academic discourse. In the second part (3.3), I would like to address more general reflections and examine the modern turn to relationality that reveals a basic conviction which underlies many fields of modern research. What I propose to do is to engage in a discussion advocating the necessity of going beyond philosophical and scientific reductionism. Touching the concepts of consciousness, self-system and time in correlation with the dialectic of matter and mind, I will draw attention to the notions of *otherness, sameness,* and *particularity* as well as *meaning, fear,* and *the beyond* as fundamental features of human relationality.

In the third part (3.4), I will narrow the focus and examine closely three particular contributions from scientific research. In order to make a strong case for some essential characteristics of what it means to be human, these characteristics must be shown to be meaningful on different levels of inquiry. Given the dialectic of matter and mind and the complexity of human life within its environment, I will approach this task from a

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[6] John Barton, 'Disclosing Human Possibilities: Revelation and Biblical Stories', in G. Sauter and J. Barton (eds.), *Revelation and Story* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 55.

[7] For an account of the importance of novelists retelling core experiences of the Bible: F.W. Dillistone, *The Novelist and the Passion Story* (London: Collins, 1960).

psychological, biological, and philosophical perspective. All three contributions share a relational view, attempt to avoid reductionism, and are very rich in their suggestions. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that the three concepts at hand are not directly influenced by one another and therefore exhibit independent implications from different angles and points of departure. Finally, drawing all the threads together in a concluding part (3.5), I will be able to propose a reliable account of what it is to be human.

3.2 INSIGHTS FROM CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

3.2.1 The importance of stories

I begin then with a brief consideration of the importance of story-telling in relation to the experience of human life as it is lived. To be alive and to be a human person means to experience. Human beings experience themselves, the other and their environment in every moment of their lives - when they move, talk, meet people, perceive the environment, think and reason. Due to these experiences human beings ask who they are, what they are, and how they can understand themselves as human beings. Looking at modern literature, especially at novels, it is amazing how these stories seem to captivate huge numbers of people. This, in my opinion, is not accidental but due to the fact that the author, as a good researcher and observer of human life, describes experiences and reveals thoughts through which many people are able to discover and include their own. A good novel, in which certain characters and their interactions with one another are described in a profound and realistic way, affects and concerns people because they have either experienced similar events or because they can honestly imagine that, due to their own life experience, these stories exhibit real human life. John Barton confirms this insight in referring to Martha Nussbaum when he observes 'that works of fiction can disclose vital insights into the question how we should live precisely because there is no fixed boundary between the "fictional" characters who appear in stories, plays and poems and the "real" people we meet every day.' Accordingly 'well-drawn characters in novels or plays are almost real and so can offer insight to real people like ourselves.'[8] In this way novels are capable of opening up essential features of human experience and thus are a vital contribution to the investigation of what it means to be human.

[8] John Barton, 'Disclosing Human Possibilities', *op. cit.*, 54.

The following discussion, therefore, is an attempt of a theologian to integrate the experience and observing capacity of some modern authors in his anthropological conclusions. I was fascinated and captivated by some bestseller novels,[9] which I have read over the last few years alongside my engagement with the present research topic. However, it was precisely this "alongside", reading books in my free time and immediately being drawn into the question of what it means to be human, that made me aware of the importance of modern literature for the understanding of anthropology. Furthermore, this contribution from the outside of theology and the human sciences secures a partly independent input to the discussion from a perspective which is largely neglected in contemporary theology and anthropology.

Understandably, as a part of a bigger chapter, this task can only be accomplished in a very limited and concentrated way. I propose to introduce and briefly discuss four bestseller books from two female and two male authors. In order to contribute various focuses on human relationship and interaction, each novel I have chosen deals with different life circumstances and social backgrounds. This choice attempts to secure, at least to some extent, a broad enough and relevant picture of human experience. It is not my intention to give detailed summaries of the stories but rather, as a result of my personal comprehension and interpretation, to draw attention to one or two main features of each novel and correlate them with the question of what seems to be essential for successful (*gelingende*) and failing (*misslingende*) relationships. In doing so I hope to highlight some proposals which modern literature puts in front of anyone who is in search of the indispensable characteristics of human life.

3.2.2 Shreve: *All He Ever Wanted*[10]

This novel by Anita Shreve tells the story of Nicholas van Tassel, Professor of English Literature and Rhetoric in a college in New Hampshire about a hundred years ago. At the back of the book one reads the following blurb: 'It is a fire in a New Hampshire hotel that brings Nicholas Van Tassel and Etna Bliss together, a chance meeting that lights up a lifelong passion. But their life is not everything they could have imagined. Many years later, Nicholas recounts their courtship and their time together. And as the threads of the story begin to unravel, what is revealed is a patchwork of promises,

[9] For details see bibliography B.4.
[10] Anita Shreve, *All He Ever Wanted* (London: Abacus, 2003).

truths, secrets and lies, and a man, madly in love, for whom his wife is all he ever wanted ...'

Anita Shreve reveals in this novel in a very profound way the depths of the human heart. Two important realms of Nicholas' life I would briefly like to emphasise. The first one is his career as a college professor in which he desperately tries to become Dean of the college. This endeavour leads him to considerable efforts at putting himself in the right position. His attempt develops into a fight against a guest Professor who recently arrived at the College to deliver some lectures. However, as is revealed to Nicholas in due course, this newcomer not only intends to stay but is also favoured by the principal of the governing body as a candidate for the position of Dean. Anita Shreve beautifully discloses Nicholas' soul and gives the reader a glimpse into his heart. From now on Nicholas' thoughts and actions display a struggle with his own biography and an ultimate incapacity to come to terms with the threatening challenge of this new colleague. His conscious reflections seem to be determined by continual comparisons; it is like a fatal race in which he forgets his own uniqueness and becomes incapable of viewing his colleague from different perspectives. In virtue of this he ultimately perceives and meets his fellow Professor only in the light of his own life destiny. This one-sidedness darkens his sight. He puts on a behaviour-mask and consequently cannot see and perceive the face of his opponent properly. Masks throw shadows and distort encounters. Jealousy creeps up and his colleague becomes his enemy. As time passes by he becomes less capable of meeting him in an honest and open way. Locking himself up in his own thought-world impedes the appreciation of his own strengths and faculties. Fear of losing the race emerges as a theme, and anxiety of not being in control dominates parts of his life. To summarize this development one could say that Nicholas fails to integrate positively the other person in his own life, not as a potential threat but as a supportive colleague, as a unity despite diversity.

The second realm is Nicholas' marriage with Etna Bliss. This relationship seems to be haunted from the very beginning. When Etna eventually agrees to marry Nicholas, he is overjoyed and accepts the fact that Etna does not really love him but more or less seeks some security. As time passes by, more and more problems are imposed on their partnership until finally their relationship breaks up. Nicholas, although he agreed with Etna on a specific type of partnership, is not able to give her enough freedom to let her appreciate things in her own way which he does not always understand. He treats her like his property, indicating the same problem as mentioned above with his colleague:

the incapacity to look into her face and to realise her otherness, thereby appreciating her uniqueness. The experience of giving her space and not knowing what she is doing in her free time starts to threaten him. Being bound up with his own thoughts and perspectives he looses the capacity to integrate and acknowledge Etna's own perspectives and life experiences. Nicholas' concept of life continuously declines from being relational, and is increasingly centred and focused around his own ego. Once he cannot understand and comprehend Etna's behaviour and thoughts he appears to be frightened of loosing control. He is incapable of coming to terms with her uniqueness. But otherness, as one can obviously learn from this novel, always implies a certain kind of incomprehension and thus loss of control.

To put it in more conceptual terms, Nicholas' life breaks up, becomes shattered and partly meaningless because of his incapacity to deal with the characteristics of otherness and particularity, which seem to demand the recognition of the other person's uniqueness and the responsibility of shaping a community (i.e., a team of colleagues or a marriage) where the other is at least not seen as an enemy. Where the relational structure of life is not appreciated, people mistrust each other, always smell danger, and put on masks. As a consequence encounters with other persons become partly faceless, dishonest and inauthentic. This then is a source of fear - a fear of not being in control, of not being able to comprehend entirely - which haunts Nicholas from the very beginning. Hence, the title of the book is paradigmatic: All *he* ever *wanted*! This results in failing relationships and an increasing isolation.

3.2.3 Sparks: *Message In A Bottle*[11]

The second novel by Nicholas Sparks tells the story of two people. One is a boatman, Garrett, a widower whose life is still determined by the loss of his wife. The other is a woman, Theresa, a divorced newspaper columnist in search of a good and exclusive story. "The message in a bottle" is found accidentally by Theresa at a beach and arouses her curiosity. The bottle contains Garrett's love letter written to his deceased wife. Theresa, with her journalistic instinct, sets off to find him, wanting to know the whole story. But life is sometimes more complicated than expected. In due course they do meet and slowly but surely fall in love with one another. This new and carefully

[11] Nicholas Sparks, *Message in a Bottle* (London: Bantam, 1999); now also a well-known film.

developing partnership becomes the main focus of the story that narrates the problems both Garret and Theresa have to face.

Garrett struggles with the memories of his deceased wife determining his behaviour towards Theresa, comparing and thus forgetting that she is different. Theresa is in conflict with her professional instinct, initially trying to write a story about him and thus reducing his unique and personal story to a journalistic pattern, which presses his life experience into specific modes of language and categories, so that everybody else might read something which ultimately is not readable. They both think in their own framework. But once they meet face to face indicating a concerned sight beyond the surface (which is not a particular moment but points to a process) and realize the particularity, the uniqueness of the other, they recognise that they have to change their behaviour towards each other. Theresa realizes that she cannot write a newspaper column anymore and Garrett recognizes that he cannot treat her always in comparison with his deceased wife. Apart from being a love story, this novel represents the experience that once I meet the other face to face, which means in proximity, in seeing the other as they are, responsibility for the other emerges. Subsequently I cannot reduce the other to the same, to my *I think*. This is valid both ways. Garrett cannot reduce her to his memories and Theresa is not able to reduce him to her categories.

However, their love deepens and is more and more realized as they both meet the other as unique and responsibly. She gives up her story and frees herself from all the comments of the colleagues in her office, puts down her mask and meets him, as she is, vulnerable and open. He in turn gives up his attempt at pressing her into his memories and thus says a last and final good-bye to his deceased wife, writing his last "message in a bottle." This whole development and the interaction of the two main characters are accompanied by the notion of fear. Both are frightened to give up their framework, to leave their masks behind and take up responsibility for the other. But once they can appreciate the otherness of the other and their uniqueness, a new start becomes possible and the experience of mutual responsibility emerges, which makes life meaningful and whole. This novel shows, despite all our dependence upon being determined by our biography, that, when we meet somebody face to face, we are able to respond gratuitously, spontaneously in responsibility for the other without any demand of reciprocity. One of the last scenes is most intriguing in this respect. Garrett, despite stormy weather, sails off to throw his final "good-bye-message" to his deceased wife into the sea. Doing this clearly indicates his newly gained responsiveness and the

realization of what is meant by looking into Theresa's face and taking up responsibility for her. Fighting the storm at the same time, he suddenly notices a wrecked boat. He *sees* the frightened *faces* of a family and without thinking, jumps into the sea and tries to rescue them. This event in which Garrett dies (sacrificing himself and dying in the attempt to rescue another person), suggests that offering oneself in a gratuitous response is meaningful in itself and reveals something of the essence of human life.

This novel points to the experience of life as relational, but again in a way that makes life most meaningful and whole when the other, in his or her particularity and uniqueness, is not perceived as a threat to my life but as an enrichment belonging to my life. This notion of *belonging to my life* indicates respect for the other as other without trying to reduce the other to the same. This otherness and the appreciation of particularity still can be the cause of fear because the framework of understanding remains open to change and new unpredictable experiences. This is why the main characters in the novel experience a lot of ups and downs, misconceptions and obstacles. But, as this novel seems to suggest, in a gratuitous response, in taking up responsibility for the other, this uncertainty and fear can be put on a firm ground capable of love and respect.

3.2.4 Harris: *Chocolat*[12]

The third novel by Joanne Harris deals very strongly with the notions of otherness and particularity, or in other terms, with unity and plurality leading to conformity or the verdict of heresy. The main contents of the novel are well summarized in the blurb on the book cover: 'When an exotic stranger, Vianne Rocher, arrives in the French village of Lansquenet and opens a chocolate boutique directly opposite the church, Father Reynaud identifies her as a serious danger to his flock – especially as it is the beginning of Lent, the traditional season of self-denial. War is declared as the priest denounces the newcomer's wares as the ultimate sin. Suddenly Vianne's shop-cum-café means that there is somewhere for secrets to be whispered, grievances to be aired, dreams to be tested. But Vianne's plans for an Easter Chocolate Festival divide the whole community in a conflict that escalates into a 'Church not Chocolate' battle. As mouths water in anticipation, can the solemnity of the Church compare with the pagan passion of a chocolate éclair?'

[12] Joanne Harris, *Chocolat* (London: Black Swan, 2000); now also a major film with the interesting difference that the main villain is the mayor instead of the priest.

There are, of course, many possible perspectives and starting points to look at in this book, which is rich in its underlying themes. For me, a major topic of interest is the ongoing conflict with the problem of otherness and particularity. This is a theme that is essential for all parties involved, Father Reynaud, the villagers and Vianne. All of them have their convictions of how things *are* and therefore have to be. The scene of the story is a French village with a small, traditional community. The main focus lies, on the one hand, on the priest and the villagers in their attempt to come to terms with new ideas and changes, and on the other, on Vianne who is used to change and diversity. As a foreigner who has lived in many countries and experienced different traditions, she represents just the opposite. Very soon after Vianne's arrival it becomes obvious that the villagers who are now compelled to reflect and take a standpoint are not really happy with the way things are. Tradition seems to have an answer for everything and the complexity of life is subordinated to the tradition, which Father Reynaud tries to defend at all costs.

From the outside everything seems to be fine and in order, but once the arguments start between Father Reynaud and Vianne many hidden problems are revealed. Now that there is a person who questions the conformity with tradition and the church rules, a beaten up wife turns up at Vianne's house and other moral inconsistencies appear. Desires emerge among the villagers which had to be suppressed hitherto. Chocolate in the middle of Lent, of course, is a perfect image for all kinds of desires which belong to our human life. However, one of the messages that is conveyed by this novel is that the denial of otherness and particularity, indicated and exhibited in the conformity of the villagers, does lead to oppressive structures, reducing plurality to uniformity. This in turn leads to a life without real enjoyment, a life in which *I* as *another* have to comply with the same. The neglect of particularity and otherness as a part of human life, be it in the encounter of a stranger or in a hidden desire of my soul, and its denunciation as dangerous turns immediately around and drowns every colourful variety of life into a dull one-coloured-ness.

The consequence is, as it happens, that Father Reynaud is not only incapable of seeing the face of Vianne but also of other villagers. Without asking, to give one example, he drags out the husband who beat up his wife and tries to turn him into a gentleman. He does not encounter him as a unique person but reduces him to the same. He is not interested in his real problems but tries to press him back into the system. Consequently, when meeting others, Father Reynaud is not responding to them but

rather to his consciousness of how things have to be. But despite some strong aversions to Vianne at the beginning, things do change in due course, people get closer and even the priest learns his lesson at the end of the story when he cannot resist chocolates' call "Try me. Test me. Taste me." and finds himself on Easter morning sitting on the floor of Vianne's shop, spilled chocolate around him. Slowly but surely the reader can learn two things.

First, if one starts to face one's own desires, not denying them but understanding, integrating, dealing and living with them, things change and life becomes more whole. If desires are integrated in a positive and not in a confrontational way, one can learn from and cope with them. Secondly, if one faces the other, who is different and always a stranger, and starts to respect his or her particularity one will be able to approach the other, respond to the other and learn to live with the other as a fellow human being and not as an enemy. Without any judging finger this novel reminds us of human relationality, not just on a sociological but also on a psychological level, trying to emphasise that human life is most meaningful and enjoyable when otherness and the other is integrated in my life without oppressing the other's particularity. Contrariwise, where the other is not seen face to face, not seen in particularity, power and authority tend to become oppressive. Where otherness cannot be appreciated, authority depends solely on the concept of sameness, which entails the division of human beings into either friend or enemy. By contrast when the other can be integrated people in a community are suddenly able to breathe fresh air, encounter each other respectfully and engage in a joyous celebration. In doing so, without being forced to give up one's own standpoint, persons take up responsibility for one another and subsequently reduce mutual fear to a minimum. Hence they can live. This is the promising end of *Chocolat*, an Easter Chocolate Festival, a joyous celebration of unity despite diversity.

3.2.5 Kneale: *English Passengers*[13]

This last novel takes us 150 years back into a nearly forgotten time, English colonialism and rule in Tasmania, the extinction of the Aborigines and the oppressive western christianised cultural attitude towards other traditions and religious beliefs. Matthew Kneale narrates a historic drama which is based on profound historic research that

[13] Matthew Kneale, *Englische Passagiere* (Stuttgart-München: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2000).

succeeds in bringing together many different characters from the English and the Tasmanian inhabitants and sheds light on human behaviour from various angles.

The story starts off with Captain Kewley and his crew from the Isle of Man trying to smuggle some cognac and tobacco from France to England but they then get caught by the English customs officer and are in need of money to escape the fate of prison. Just in time three English gentlemen arrive on the scene, desperately in need of a ship for an excursion to Tasmania in order to find the Garden of Eden. This journey turns out to be very adventurous and the reader is introduced to three main characters. Reverend Wilson, now searching for his last piece of proof, tries to verify biblical infallibility by his geological studies by demonstrating that the Garden of Eden lies in Tasmania. Doctor Potter is only interested in collecting samples of human skulls and bones for writing his book 'The Destiny of the Nations' in which he divides the human races into superior and inferior classes. Mr. Renshaw meanwhile is a botanist who wants to escape from his family.

Parallel to this story, the reader learns from the perspectives of the Aborigine Peevay, the settlers, and different officials how the British Empire *is forced* to extinguish the Tasmanian tribes because they are not willing to accept the Christian faith and the western civilised way of living. The details which Matthew Kneale reveals in this novel are shocking and give a profound insight into human consciousness and how convictions tend to become oppressive and authoritarian, if based on a worldview entirely isolated from others. Kneale narrates in the form of personal diaries, letters and jotted-down notes, which give the reader a good insight into the characters of the main actors in the drama. Their lines of arguments are disclosed and their convictions are brought to light. Looking closely at every character one soon recognizes similar patterns of dealing with the other. It seems that everybody perceives their environment, be it the other person on the ship, the Tasmanian Aborigine, the English settler or the different cultural and religious traditions, exclusively from their own framework of thought. Reverend Wilson's whole worldview and his perception of persons and things are totally centred around *his* Christian faith and dogmas, leaving no room for the truth or reasonableness of other traditions or interpretations of events. Doctor Potter's perception and judgement of Reverend Wilson or of the Aborigines is wholly determined by his anthropological studies and his extreme ideas about the destinies of the nations. The others are automatically put in a category of sameness, not taken seriously, and thus deprived of their individuality and uniqueness. And, to mention a

third example, the perception of Peevay, the Aborigine, depends so much on his biography and the experience of hatred that he is not able to make room for *new* interpretations and experiences. Here again one observes a reduction of the other to the same. It is very intriguing that towards the end of the story it is Captain Kewley who remains alive. He is an ordinary man, a one-off-smuggler decided upon in order to survive and earn some money. But now and again he is able to see the other. Although having his own ideas and frameworks of understanding, he leaves room for the others and lets them be as they are. Reverend Wilson ends up insane and schizophrenic and Doctor Potter drowns with the ship, two persons who radically subdued the other and the perception of events to their own framework of sameness.

There are many other features and themes to this book, but this topic of unity and plurality, sameness and otherness that I just emphasised seems an important one. It indicates that so many of the dreadful events like the extinction of Aborigines, the oppressing structures of colonialism, the disparaging assessment of other cultures and traditions and the trait of superiority were rooted in a one-sided doctrine of unity and sameness and in the incapacity to appreciate otherness and particularity. Consequently different traditions, religious rituals and social behaviour which could not be explained out of one's own experience and thought framework had to be assessed either as dangerous and barbarian or as inferior and in need of development aid. This negative structure of humanness seems to suggest the following conclusion. If the other is perceived from the isolated perspective of the selfish ego, he is very easily reduced either to a threatening or an inferior object, both leading to oppressive structures and the incapacitation of the other.

Closely linked with the patterns of sameness is the notion of fear. Unity and conformity seem to help people to see things "clear", that is to say, to give them a clear explanation and interpretation which keeps oneself in control. Otherness – the stranger, i.e. the Doctor, the Reverend, the Settler, the Aborigine, the behaviour that I do not understand, the tradition which seems meaningless – is a threat to my framework. Otherness, therefore, includes the possibility of fear, the fear of losing oneself, being wrong, or losing control. The interactions of the main characters in Kneale's *English Passengers* precisely reflect this fear which leads them to one-sided perceptions and disparaging verdicts.

3.2.6 Conclusion

Having surveyed these four novels the reader now has a good picture of the complexity of human relationships. Two main notions can be singled out that gave all the different relationships and encounters their reference system: sameness and otherness or, in other terms, unity and plurality. Human life, the search for meaning, the endeavour for meaningful relationships and the sometimes-everyday struggle for survival appear always to be correlated with the notions of sameness and otherness. The novels thus advocate the following conclusions. On the one hand, human beings experience an inescapable embeddedness in relational structures in which the other is and always remains particular and incomprehensible, and on the other, human beings experience a dependence upon a certain level of sameness, that is to say, on agreed frameworks which tell them (without the need of a continuous reshuffle) what is reliable and reasonable. This *aporia*, which is never resolved and remains a continuous battle in one's consciousness, entails the experience of fear. Fear, therefore, emerges as the counterpart of the sameness-otherness structure of human life. Fear of not being in control, of having to reshuffle one's convictions and change one's life, or of admitting to being wrong seemed to underlie many of the convictions, dialogues, and arguments in the above-presented books. The stories point to this problem and seem to suggest that it is of great importance that if human beings want to live on this earth in peace and mutual understanding they must focus on the notions of sameness, otherness and fear. Hence concepts of power and authority have to correlate precisely with these findings. A human understanding of power and authority has to prepare the ground for the possibility of dealing with the sameness-otherness dialectic and of minimizing the experience of fear in order to increase a respectful celebration of life. Where fear is partly overcome in the attempt to integrate the other or the stranger in one's own life concept, relationships begin to be less tight and fearful and more caring and understanding. Then, mutual understanding despite incomprehensibility and mutual respect and fairness despite disparity of views seem to be the most profound and promising possibility of human communitarian existence. This then might be called a reconciled fully human existence.

3.3 THE TURN TO RELATIONALITY

3.3.1 Beyond reductionism

The complexity and relationality of human life with its inherent notions of otherness and sameness is of course part of a larger picture. In the human sciences relationality has become a key concept for understanding the human person as a very complex being. So what I want to do now is examine the scientific turn to relationality and look for some clues that will advance our understanding of this complexity of human life as relational. The fundamental experience of everyday life is that one cannot inquire after the understanding of being and look upon oneself without always being surrounded by others, that one is deeply embedded in social structures and cultural settings which form one's self-understanding and that human freedom as self-determination always is a limited freedom, depending on the decisions others have already made. Furthermore, the significance of bodily existence and the interdependency between body and soul cannot be disregarded, which raises the scientific question about the relation between matter and mind and its subsequent consequences for a concept of personhood. But, and this is vital to note, these experiences of being in relation with others and with one's own body do not necessarily determine the concept of personhood as long as relations are conceived as accidents, that is to say, as a secondary structure subordinated to being. This assumption, held by many scientists and philosophers up to the twentieth century, led to the conclusion that the essence of being can be understood from the self and this resulted in an equation of subjectivity and being. The concepts of personhood and subjectivity could be derived from the vantage point of the self and its reasoning regarded as the primary entity opposed to the other and the world.

The modern turn to relationality challenged this view, posing the following questions: Am I wholly myself without the other? Is the other as a subject a mere person opposite who only concerns me as an object or is he in a certain way *substantially necessary* for me? Is consciousness and self-understanding possible without body and subsequently the other? And what about our environment and the evolutionary process? Does not the fact that we as human beings are biologically embedded *in a world* represent more than just a subject-object relation? Moreover, if relations belong to the essence of being, then the other *is* a part of myself and relations are not mere accidents. A relational view therefore suggests that being human means *being relational* and thus

essentially bound up with the other as a primary condition for any concept of subjectivity or human personhood.

Interestingly, this emphasis on relationality is also supported by the natural sciences. For instance particle physics with its assumption of energy fields is to a large degree all about relations, about interpenetrating and mutually binding energy fields. F. L. Shults, referring to the scientists Prigogine and Stengers, argues that 'most physicists agree that units and relations are distinct but interdependent: "for an interaction to be real, the 'nature' of the related things must derive from these relations, while at the same time the relations must derive from the 'nature' of the things".'[14] Following this development it was inevitable that there followed criticism of substance metaphysics (that subordinated relations to substance) and of the deterministic and mechanistic views of the early modern sciences (that emphasised a linear cause-effect principle). Clear distinctions between assumed opposites or orders of priority such as substance and relation, body and mind, subject and object became less evident and were seen in a new light that acknowledges an indispensable interdependency which does not permit a subordination of one to the other.

A case in point, indicating the necessity of such a relational view, is the problem of consciousness which stands in the centre of the scientific body and soul debate. The concept of consciousness, which plays an essential role for any understanding of personhood, exhibits the dialectic between body and soul, matter dependent brain functions and consciousness dependent psychological states. There are some extreme positions on each side of the body-soul debate, believing either in the omni-competence of science or in the metaphysical principle of an immortal soul. Ideological one-sidedness leads, on the one hand, Peter Atkins, a lecturer in Physical Chemistry who believes in the omni-competence of science, to talk about "purposeless people" declaring that human persons are 'creatures of chance, nothing more than fragments of highly organized matter.'[15] On the other hand, Richard Swinburne, former Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at Oxford, tries to proof from his theistic perspective not only that the soul is an immaterial thing but also that 'the conscious life of thought, sensation, and purpose which belongs to a man belongs to him because it

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[14] F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: B. Eerdmans, 2003), 18. For an account of relational logic and the Trinity: Hermann Deuser, 'Trinität und Relation', *Marburger Jahrbuch für Theologie* 10 (1998), 95-128.

[15] Peter Atkins, 'Purposeless People', in A. Peacocke and G. Gillett (eds.), *Persons and Personality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 13.

belongs to his soul.'[16] These extreme convictions are misleading because they neglect human experience in which the relation of matter and mind, body and soul cannot be dissolved in favour of the one for the other. Both positions neglect the problem of incomparability and ignore the limits of their respective field of expertise.[17] Regarding the problem of human consciousness, while the concept of meaning or purpose cannot be dealt with by physical concepts, the mechanisms of brain functions cannot be explained by metaphysics. Furthermore, they confuse three different approaches and levels of interest concerning human personhood, which, following David Wiggins, can be called (a) persons as objects of biological inquiry, (b) persons as subjects of consciousness, and (c) persons as the locus of value.[18]

To acknowledge this dialectic and aporetic structure of being-ness leads to a relational view which claims 'that human consciousness (or mind) cannot be explained either by completely reducing it to brain functions (monism) or by separating it substantially from the body (dualism). The former cannot account for subjectivity, and the latter cannot elucidate the interaction between body and mind.'[19] Rather it is the case that one cannot be conceived without the other. It seems to be the relation between matter and mind, distinct and yet inseparably combined, which forms the ground for consciousness and personhood. Contemporary scientific research, thus, highlights different levels of relationality and claims that our consciousness is a complexity of biophysiological, sociocultural, intra-psychic and even transpersonal aspects which suggest that 'because so many factors interrelate to create consciousness, interconnectiveness is a property fundamental to consciousness.'[20]

At the same time this relationality and interconnectiveness can only be conceived as an aporia. Matter and mind deny each other the possibility of explaining and conceptualising the other by their own terms and suggest that a holistic view is needed of what it means to be a human person. The so-called scientific working hypothesis of *simplicity* then seems to be nothing more than a dishonest intellectual battle to secure one's own conviction. It exhibits the suppression of fear in not being able to come to

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[16] Richard Swinburne, 'The Structure of the Soul', in A. Peacocke and G. Gillett (eds.), *Persons and Personality*, 33.

[17] For a survey of the current debate between psychology and theology in relation to brain and consciousness: Fraser Watts, 'Psychology and Theology', in C. Southgate (ed.), *God, Humanity and the Cosmos*, 193-209. For a balanced dialogue between modern physics and theology: David Wilkinson, *God, Time and Stephen Hawking* (London: Monarch Books, 2001).

[18] David Wiggins, 'The Person as Object of Science, as Subject of Experience, and as Locus of Value', in A. Peacocke and G. Gillett (eds.), *Persons and Personality*, 56, 67.

[19] Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 182.

[20] John Boghosian Arden, *Science, Theology and Consciousness: The Search for Unity* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 11.

terms with an unsolvable aporia. Reductionism seems always to be a frantic endeavour for keeping control, excluding from the very start the possibility of a significant contribution from "the other side", and to that degree violating human experience.[21] It might be noted that the ceaseless human experience of fear, which came to the fore in the previous part (thoughtfully and vividly described by modern novels), seems to connect with a deeper level that anchors precisely in this aporia, which indicates *being*'s refusal to be grasped and explained by solely one concept or another. However, what must be pointed out, if matter and mind are so deeply interwoven with one another, is that this being bound together cannot be confined to the *self centred consciousness* of a subject. My body as matter-dependent is also determined by my surrounding matter, the other and the world. Consequently human consciousness cannot be seen as a mere opposite of the other and the world. A relational view, taking this interwoven-ness seriously, has to take the other and the world into account for the understanding of personhood.

3.3.2 Egocentricity and exocentricity

In order to broaden the perspective on relationality I now would like to draw attention to some developments within the fields of philosophy and psychology and outline some general implications for a concept of personhood and self-consciousness. John Macmurray was one who, from a philosophical viewpoint, tried to overcome a false subject-object dualism in arguing for the primacy of relational being. The self is at the same time subject and object and due to this fact concepts of personhood and self-understanding can never be isolated from others.[22] Martin Buber, with his philosophical personalism, was another driving force in the first half of the twentieth century who stressed very strongly the relatedness of the I to the Thou in order to become an I. 'The primary word I–Thou establishes the world of relation.'[23] With this presupposition he was able to prompt the philosophical discussion towards the notion of meeting as real

[21] Note that even Arden's relational approach in his *Science, Theology and Consciousness* tends to become reductionist. His attempt to reconcile the sciences with theology from an evolutionary perspective neglects from the very start the possibility of a "beyond being" and results in a spiritual pantheism. Despite his agreement with the concepts of "relativity" and the "incompleteness theorem" he compares and interprets all experience from the scientific concept of evolutionary process. Claiming a new paradigm shift and criticising reductionism, he himself becomes a reductionist in not acknowledging the conceptual difference of philosophical discourse or religious experience (indicating a beyond phenomenology) and his physical-psychological method.

[22] See John Aves, 'Persons in Relation: John Macmurray', in C. Schwöbel and C. Gunton (eds.), *Persons, Divine and Human* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 120-37.

[23] Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 18.

living. Consequently Buber defines: 'In the beginning is relation – as category of being, readiness, grasping from, mould for the soul; it is the *a priori* of relation, *the inborn Thou.*'[24] And in virtue of that he concludes that 'through the *Thou* a man becomes *I.*'[25] There is now wide agreement amongst scholars that 'instead of autonomous subjects that stand over against the natural world and other subjects, today human self-consciousness is understood as always and already embedded in relations between self, other and world.'[26] This implies that the other as particular and distinct from me *is* an integral part of the self, suggesting that one cannot think of being without integrating the notion of otherness. Taking relationality seriously therefore seems to allow for a more holistic view of what it means to be human including the notions of otherness and particularity.

Another way of looking at the present concern is through the lens of psychology which strongly supports and deepens this understanding of relationality. Especially developmental psychology stresses the fact that the whole process of developing one's identity and self-understanding as a person depends essentially on external social circumstances. Developmental analyses distinguish between different steps and levels within the process of the formation of identity from childhood to adulthood.[27] However, in a number of psychological schools and concepts one still faces the remnants of Freud's deterministic and mechanistic view. Freud saw in his depth-psychoanalytical method, dependent on the early modern sciences, the person as an apparatus. A person is determined by his unconsciousness, in which the "drives" and the "Id-instance" play the main role and therefore have to be made conscious in therapy. In this concept the *I* is mainly driven by the *Id.* Freud, obviously coming from the side of the natural sciences, mainly saw a person from the perspective of his biological functions.[28] This supported in the first half of the twentieth century the dualism of body and soul, mind and matter. Either a person was seen more in abstract categories in his biological functions (body and matter) or from his inner spiritual aspects as a subject with feeling and values (mind and soul).[29] Nowadays sharp dualistic views belong largely to the past and it seems to be acknowledged that a human being as a person has to be conceived in more holistic

[24] Ibid., 43.
[25] Ibid., 44.
[26] Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 31.
[27] For a profound study of developmental psychology: Rolf Oerter and Leo Montada, *Entwicklungspsychologie* (München: Psychologie Verlags Union, 1987).
[28] For a study of Freud's psychoanalysis: Jürgen Kriz, *Grundkonzepte der Psychotherapie* (München: Psychologie Verlags Union, 1989), 29-49.
[29] For a survey of modern psychological schools: Dieter Wyss, *Die tiefenpsychologischen Schulen von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972).

views. 'Today personality as a whole is seen as the basis for understanding the parts. The whole person registers itself in particular behaviors... The sciences still allow for a weak sense of duality, i.e., a distinction between biological and material events, but not for dual*ism*, in the sense of two separate substances.'[30]

To come to terms with this inner-personal dialectic of matter and mind and the problem of unity in diversity modern concepts of the self appear to be helpful. That a human person can understand himself is due to the fact that he is able to relate to himself. In virtue of that fact it is necessary to distinguish between self and ego. But this distinction has to be perceived under the principle of inseparable interrelatedness. A person is able to relate to himself and his surrounding world precisely through the relatedness of the ego and the self. Through this relation a person is able to act, think and know, and therefore *is*. Pannenberg tries to describe this dialectic as follows:

> Personality is then defined as the presence of the self in the ego. When this viewpoint is adopted, it is possible to surmount the oppositions between the "absolute" concept of person, which is limited to the individual that exists for itself, and the "rational" concept, which looks rather to the conditioning of the ego by the Thou and by society. The premise here is the idea of the self, which, on the one hand, is mediated through the dialogically structured social sphere and therefore shows itself to be constituted by the symbiotic exocentricity of the individual, and with which, on the other hand, the ego knows itself to be identical in the for-itself of its self-consciousness.[31]

This statement, dealing with a reasonable distinction between the notion of the ego and the self and its interrelationship and interdependency, provides a good example of the importance of the concept of relationality and the integration of otherness into the understanding of human personhood. Symbiotic exocentricity (*symbiotische Exzentrizität)* of the *self* is a suitable term to depict precisely such an indispensable togetherness of the Thou and the "outer" world with the *ego* in its for-itself (*Fürsichsein).* While *ego* signifies a person's irreducible essence of "for-itself" which nobody can ever share, the *self* signifies simultaneously this person's essential interwoven-ness with its outer world without which there would be no egocentric "for-itself" at all. This concept of the self allows for a balance between determinism and freedom and also between particularity or uniqueness and otherness. Consequently, '[i]nstead of autonomous subjects that stand over against the natural world and other subjects, today human self-consciousness is understood as always and already

[30] Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 180.
[31] *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985), 236-7.

embedded in relations between self, other and world.'[32] This leads to the conclusion that a concept of personhood must include the notion of otherness, which integrates the other and the environment as a necessary condition for developing self-consciousness. To be whole and to be a human person in the sense of finding oneself and being oneself then can be described as a becoming oneself through meeting otherness. This *becoming oneself* expresses the organisation of persons' self-systems through continuous connection and interrelationship with their consciousnesses, which displays the interrelating factors of biophysiological, sociocultural and psychological aspects. '[S]elf-systems are differentially aware and sensitive not only to their own subjective experiences but to the environment and to others. Consciousness is not a static structure.'[33] This openness and interconnectiveness of the human consciousness underlines the aspect of wholeness through otherness. However, this also points to a major *aporia*. Otherness would not be otherness if it is reduced to the sameness of what subjects know due to their *Fürsichsein*. A tension remains which cannot be resolved.

At this point an important implication can be drawn in connection with the experience of fear. Because otherness always lingers in human beings' consciousnesses as a part of their self-system it continuously challenges persons and thus can be seen as a major factor for the experience of fear. The tension between sameness and otherness, or in Pannenberg's words between *egocentricity* and *exocentricity*, has to be kept in a healthy balance, otherwise one will fearfully fall off to one or the other side of the divide, leading to a distorted or diminished realization of human life. When Fritz Riemann in his depth-psychological analysis describes fear as something that accompanies us from birth to death and that fear signifies a basic condition of human life, this then supports the present argument.[34] According to Riemann the human self finds itself placed in-between four demands, I. the demand for uniqueness and self-love (individuation), II. the demand for opening oneself to the world and the other (altruism), III. the demand for duration (safety and security), and IV. the demand for development (change).[35] While I. and III. depict the importance of sameness within the self-system in order to maintain one's own particularity and the duration of a particular condition (*Fürsichsein*), II. and IV. emphasise the indispensability of otherness in order to avoid

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[32] Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 31. Cf. Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, Volume 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 63-8.
[33] Boghosian Arden, *Science, Theology and Consciousness*, 35.
[34] *Grundformen der Angst. Eine tiefenpsychologische Studie* (München-Basel: E. Reinhardt Verlag, 1994).
[35] Ibid., 13-5.

isolation and bondage and a finality that contradicts the openness and incompleteness of the human condition (*Exzentrizität*). In view of this Riemann depicts four basic forms of fear which exhibit the human condition from a depth-psychological perspective: the fear of giving oneself, the fear of becoming oneself, the fear of change, and the fear of necessity and finality.[36] This then reflects not only in a profound way the relational structure of the human self-system which revolves around the poles of sameness and otherness, but also provides an explanation for the experiences of fear within human beings' struggles for successful relationships as encountered in the previous part of this chapter.

3.3.3 Time and consciousness

To expand the argument a little further I now want to connect the reflections with some considerations on time as another condition for being human. As conscious beings human beings perceive themselves and their environment always in correlation with time. Time as a continuous process, as something that makes it possible to distinguish between past, present, and future, is a necessary condition for human consciousnesses and self-systems to be operative. It is due to the factor of time that human beings are able to perceive themselves as being born, being young or old. This function of time, which enables human beings to experience that they are not static but dynamic and alive, that they develop, change, are happy, suffer and die, is one of the main factors through which they are able to relate to the world and to themselves as described earlier. Time is necessary for human self-understanding and consequently is constitutive for being a person.[37]

However, the notion of time also reveals an ambiguity. It is the contradiction of subjective human experience, on the one hand, to perceive oneself as a unity and

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[36] Ibid., 15.

[37] In employing the concept of time as distinct from space I disagree with the stasis theory of time. This proposal from modern physics contradicts human experience and relegates the debate about human consciousness, mind, and soul to an inferior place. Time as past, present, and future then is merely a psychological phenomenon but ultimately not as real as the actual physical space-like nature of time. This is not convincing because modern physics seems to neglect the vital fact that in order to investigate into living things one has to take part in life. A stasis theory of time as an interpretation of the special theory of relativity (presupposing an objective view from the outside of life and humanity) imposed on human life as it is lived and experienced by self-experiencing subjects of a given reality violates its own premises as an observational science from within this same reality. The stasis theory itself as a conscious construct of the mind is also part of a merely psychological phenomenon which *denies us access* to knowledge that reaches beyond human experience. For a brief survey of the time-space problem: Lawrence Osborn, 'Theology and the New Physics', in C. Southgate (ed.), *God, Humanity and the Cosmos*, esp. 123-8. Cf. below section 3.4.2.

simultaneously, on the other, as not being able to perceive oneself as such a unity.[38] Persons perceive themselves as psychic-physic unities, as being distinguished from others and being able to relate to oneself, move, feel, know and think. Persons seems to know themselves but at the same time experience the fact that they do not *really* know themselves. Persons sometimes are alarmed by unexpected self behaviour, by not knowing their own future or by the experience of dependence or being influenced by others which seems to contradict the assumption that the self-system always is itself, possesses itself.

This ambivalent experience can be made intelligible from the perspective of time. Although the presence, the *here and now*, is the most certain of time because it always *is*, it is at the same time always gone. Presence can never be grasped, it simply is, but it is never a *being there* in a way that I *have* it.[39] But precisely because of this condition of time human beings are able to look at themselves and at their world. Because the '*being there*' of their presence always already has slipped out of their hands, they can relate to themselves, conceive themselves, and thus learn, develop, act and react. The consequence is that *to be consciously* under the circumstances of time means *to always be in relation with one's past* and therefore not be able to perceive oneself as complete and whole in the *presence* of the *being there*. This leaves the *presence* of the *being there* open, it cannot be grasped by consciousness.[40] The self-system as it is studied in the human sciences, therefore, opens up space for transcendence and the *beyond being*.[41] As a human being, as long as I shall live, I am always "on the move". The notion of time, therefore, appears to be intrinsically transcendent. An understanding of the fullness of human reality and of the meaning of human existence cannot easily be detached from this *beyond* structure and an appropriate notion of transcendence.[42]

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[38] Walter Schulz, 'Differente Bestimmungen der Subjektivität in der Tradition', in *Prüfendes Denken. Essays zur Wiederbelebung der Philosophie* (Tübingen: Klöpfer und Meyer, 2002), 109.
[39] Ibid., 97-113.
[40] For a similar point, below section 3.4.3.
[41] Thus one is not surprised that precisely this philosophical aspect of time is omitted by reductionists (e.g. Peter Atkins and John Boghosian Arden) in their search for unity as mentioned above.
[42] It is interesting to realize how Arden confuses two levels of discourse. He explains the development of human consciousness as the result of the evolutionary process, which makes good sense as long as he remains on the conceptual level of physics or the interconnection of mind and matter from a psychological viewpoint. But then suddenly he comes up with concepts of meaning and introduces ethical terms depicting spirituality as the energetic unity between individuals and biosphere, which represent love and compassion for the other. Consequently love and compassion are not only the outcome of the evolutionary process but also are more important and show higher organized levels of consciousness than other notions. It is bewildering that suddenly the processes of change within the evolutionary process (leap into higher states of organizations of matter and fields of information) take on meaning, are loving, caring, compassionate or selfish. At this point one can observe how his own biography and western christianised values creep into his concept without being introduced and without noticing the confusion of

This condition might help us to understand more profoundly that human beings as relational beings aspire after meaning and hope and ultimately can find this only when they transcend their experience. This is because, as long as they live in the present and are consciously concerned with the past, they never wholly possess themselves. From this perspective it also becomes intelligible why human beings are existentially and ultimately more concerned with questions like "What will the future bring?", "What comes after death?" or "How can my life become meaningful and whole?" than they are with questions dealing with the past. With the latter, they are concerned in so far as they want to gain new insights and knowledge from past problems for the solution of future issues. Thus the study of the past and the analysis of already occurred problems are a tool for coping with the *not-being-able-to possess-oneself*, and in such a way live and hope for a better future. But precisely because of this exposure to time, every day that passes adds new insights, but new insights and knowledge, as much as they help to solve some problems, simultaneously add new open questions and unsolved problems. Life, therefore, always leads us into new, unfamiliar and unknown experiences. The experiences of fear, as observed in the various life stories, then make sense as a continuous companion on a journey that is essentially incomplete and open.[43]

3.3.4 Summary

With these reflections on consciousness, self-system and time I have attempted to underline and support the case for relationality. Concepts equating subjectivity and being or adhering to the positivism of philosophical idealism, which put the *I* over the *Thou* and assume the autonomous subject, had to be questioned and rejected. It is now possible to assert that the emphasis on relationality helps to overcome reductionism, which either stresses a one-sided monism (leading to the subordination of consciousness to matter or object to subject) or dualism (favouring a strict opposition). In conclusion then, these findings move us in the direction of a holistic view of human personhood in which the notions of otherness and sameness (inherent in the dialectic of body and soul or subject and object) as well as the notions of meaning and the beyond (inherent in the dialectic of time and consciousness) are held together – including the notion of fear –

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metaphysics and the natural sciences. The question why love should be better than hate or compassion better than killing cannot be addressed by the evolutionary process. See esp. chapter 8 in his *Science, Theology and Consciousness*.

[43] Cf. Riemann, *Grundformen der Angst*, 199-212. See also above section 3.3.2.

and only together can they build the ground for an understanding of what it means to be human. Out of these reflections on relationality the following preliminary implications can be drawn: being human means being *on the move*, never possessing oneself and as a conscious person being *inescapably in relation* with one's own self, the other and the environment. However, looking on the other side of the coin, this *being on the move* and this *being in relation* is precisely what renders it possible that a human being thinks, perceives and knows and therefore *is* a human person. Hence, to be a conscious person entangled in this dialectic and exposed to the aporia of matter and mind, reality and possibility, also means to strive for meaning, to be opened up towards a *beyond*, and in this way longing for hope and a fulfilled life.

3.4 INSIGHTS FROM SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY

In order to reach a point from where I will be able to make a strong case for some essential and hence universal characteristics of what it means to be human, the rather broad picture of the first two parts has to be tested and conveyed against the scrutinizing gaze of some profound, subtle and comprehensive concepts of scientific research. What I propose to do now is to engage in a conversation with psychological, biological and philosophical research in order to secure at least to some extent a comprehensive and differentiated conceptualisation. If the findings from the previous two parts reflect some truth of what it means to be human then surely a closer look into the physiological-psychological realm of humanness as well as some phenomenological and metaphysical reflections will not completely contradict these findings. Rather they will help to get rid of some incidental features and sharpen the focus on what really matters.

To pursue this task I will examine three scientific contributions which are all relational from the very outset in attempting to overcome one-sided reductionist accounts of the past. The first focuses on Viktor Frankl's concept of Logotherapy. This investigation aims at an understanding of personhood from a psychological perspective and emphasises the notions of meaning and responsibility in connection with a transcendent concept of the human conscience. The second contribution engages with Viktor von Weizsäcker's medical anthropology. There I shift the focus from psychology to biology. Weizsäcker's research examines the unity of movement and perception in each biological act which displays a paradigm for the inseparability of matter and mind and thus contributes a strong case against any reductionist approach. This will lead to some crucial insights into the concepts of relationality and otherness in relation to the

human experience of crisis and fear. The third contribution then turns to philosophy and highlights some features of Emmanuel Levinas' thought. My intention will be to exhibit Levinas' distinctive understanding of the "*beyond being*" that provides some substantial arguments for the importance of the concepts of transcendence, otherness and responsiveness.

3.4.1 Frankl: Meaning and responsibility

3.4.1.1 The will to meaning

Viktor E. Frankl, the founder of Logotherapy, the "Dritten Wiener Richtung der Psychoanalyse," intends to re-humanize anthropological research by surmounting an absolute determinism, insisting on the assumption that the human dimension goes beyond the biological and psychological dimension. Therefore Logotherapy and its underlying perception of humanness display an important contribution toward the search for an appropriate concept of what it means to be human. It is amazing that this concept has been ignored in theological anthropology and never really taken into consideration. Contemporary practical theologians concerned with pastoral care have rightly lamented this fact and are re-discovering the significance of this concept. W. Kurz argues that Frankl's Logotherapy is a happy discovery for practical theology and especially for the theory of pastoral care because theology has an immediate affinity to the category which is at the centre of Logotherapy: meaning.[44]

Frankl aims at the overcoming of the one-sidedness of both traditional psychoanalysis and behaviourism, as both advocate a form of reductionism. While psychoanalysis, as represented in the Freudian schools, sees a human mainly as 'a being whose basic concern is to satisfy drives and gratify instincts,' behaviourism understands the human reality 'merely as the outcome of conditioning process or conditioned reflex.'[45] Of course there is no doubt about the importance of each school within their own dimension, but for an appropriate description of what it means to be human, without neglecting the essential dialectic of body and mind, one has to go beyond these

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[44] W. Kurz, in Holger Eschmann, *Theologie der Seelsorge. Grundlagen, Konkretionen, Perspektiven* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2000), 113.

[45] Viktor Frankl, *The Unheard Cry for Meaning: Psychotherapy and Humanism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), 17. Hereafter: [*Unheard Cry*].

concepts, beyond the assumption of determinism.[46] Otherwise the human person is being deprived of his humanness.[47] One of Frankl's favourite stories, which I would like to quote here in full, illuminates this concern.

> In a favorite story of mine, a rabbi was consulted by two parishioners. One contended that the other's cat had stolen and eaten five pounds of butter, which the other denied. "Bring me the cat," the rabbi ordered. They brought him the cat. "Now bring me scales." They brought him scales. "How many pounds of butter did you say the cat has eaten?" he asked. "Five pounds, rabbi," was the answer. Thereupon the rabbi put the cat on the scales and it weighed exactly five pounds. "Now I have the butter," the rabbi said, "but where is the cat?" This is what happens when eventually the reductionists rediscover in man all the conditioned reflexes, conditioning processes, innate releasing mechanism and whatever else they have been seeking. "Now we have it," they say, like the rabbi, "but where is man?"[48]

For Frankl reductionism is the nihilism of today because it treats a human being mainly as a thing among others and does not leave enough space for meaning, freedom and responsibility, which are, according to Frankl's own experience and research, main characteristics of human personhood. He is compelled to move beyond determinism not mainly out of philosophical reflections but because of his therapeutic experience and the integration of his own personal life experiences and his deep concern for dignified human life despite all suffering. "The will to meaning", which becomes one of his basic notions, forces itself onto him.[49] One major and very credible prop of his argument is the experience of the unheard cry for meaning, which is initially based on his own encounter with suffering and death.

> Nobody needs to remind me of the fact of human determinism – after all I am a specialist of neurology and psychiatry and as such I know all about the human bio-psychological

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[46] Frankl is clear about the fact that human beings are determined to a large degree by their biological, psychological and sociological conditions. They are not free from these conditions, hence they are not free *from* but they are *free towards something*. Human beings are free to take a stand and to respond to these conditions: Frankl, *Ärztliche Seelsorge. Grundlagen der Logotherapie und Existenzanalyse* (Wien: Deuticke, 2005), 51.

[47] Frankl quotes the American sociologist W.I. Thompson: 'Humans are not objects that exist as chairs or tables; they live, and if they find that their lives are reduced to the mere existence of chairs and tables, they commit suicide': *Ärztliche Seelsorge*, 48.

[48] *Unheard Cry*, 56.

[49] Most convincing is Frankl's own documentation of life in the concentration camps, in which he attempts to describe and then psychologically analyse the different phases of camp life the inmates had to go through. He finishes his phenomenological documentation as follows: 'Life in concentration camps undoubtedly opened up a view into an abyss of extreme depth of the human nature. Should it surprise us that in these depths again we find mere humanness? Humanness as that what it is – a blend of good and evil! The schism, which penetrates all humaneness and separates between good and evil, reaches to the depths of the depths and is even disclosed at the ground of this abyss, which the concentration camp exhibits. We may have had the opportunity to become acquainted with the human being in a way that no other generation had before us. What is a human being? He is the being [*Wesen*] that always *decides* what it is. He is the being that invented the gas chamber, but at the same time he is the being that went into the gas chamber with heads held high and a prayer on the lips': *...trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen. Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000), 139. [My translation.]

> conditionedness. However I am not only a specialist of two disciplines but also a survivor of four camps, concentration camps, and therefore I know about the freedom of human beings who are capable of reaching beyond their conditions and are able to face worst conditions and situations and to battle against them by virtue of - what I am used to call - the defiant power of the Spirit [*die Trotzmacht des Geistes*].[50]

Throughout his work as a doctor and a psychotherapist Frankl observed that human persons ultimately do not strive after material happiness, power, or sex but after a meaningful existence, after a meaningful life.[51] This search for meaning gains importance beyond the determining factors of life (the biological and psychological dimension), indicating 'a distinctive characteristic of being human.'[52] Frankl calls this characteristic "the will to meaning" and describes it not only as a true manifestation of man's humanness, but also as a reliable criterion of mental health.[53] It safeguards the conviction that to be human is more than being a product of genetic givenness and the amalgamation of drives and conditioning processes. This will to meaning has "survival value" and is always a pointer to self-transcendence, which means 'the primordial anthropological fact that being human is being always directed, and pointing, to something or someone else other than oneself: to a meaning to fulfil or another human being to encounter, a cause to serve or a person to love.'[54]

3.4.1.2 From meaning to responsibility

In view of this Frankl translates "Logos" as *meaning* and defines logotherapy as "therapy through meaning", which is somewhat different from the traditional understanding of psychotherapy as "meaning through therapy". Human Being (*menschliches Sein*), Frankl argues, always transcends itself and points to meaning. Because life is meaningful every single person is related in his or her particular situation to his or her special meaning. At this point it is important to note that Frankl distinguishes between two levels of meaning. First, there is a concrete meaning of a concrete situation in life which a human person can perceive and realize. Second, there is the transcending significance of meaning, which Frankl calls the "super-meaning" (*Übersinn*), a notion that is based on the concept of conscience, which will be explained

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[50] *Ärztliche Seelsorge*. 51. [My translation.]
[51] Elisabeth Lukas, *Rendevouz mit dem Leben. Ermutigungen für die Zukunft* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 2000), 7. Cf. Frankl's interesting observation that due to life conditions and under-nourishment in the concentration camps the sexual urge was absent: ... *trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen*, 57-8.
[52] *Unheard Cry*, 29.
[53] Ibid., 34.
[54] Ibid., 35.

later on. With this latter notion he emphasises that there is a meaning that transcends every human understanding, a meaning that lies beyond human knowability. It is precisely the existence of this *Übersinn* which makes it possible that concrete meaning can be found in all circumstances, even in suffering. Frankl finds confirmation for this assumption by looking at extreme experiences of suffering where we are no longer able to alter a situation but where we are still capable of finding meaning and are challenged to change ourselves.

> It is true that if there was anything to uphold man in such an extreme situation as Auschwitz and Dachau, it was the awareness that life has a meaning to be fulfilled, albeit in the future. But meaning and purpose were only a necessary condition of survival, not a sufficient condition. Millions had to die in spite of their vision of meaning and purpose. Their belief could not save their lives, but it did enable them to meet death with heads held high. ... Uncounted examples of such heroism and martyrdom bear witness to the uniquely human potential to find, and fulfil, meaning even *'in extremis'* and *'in ultimis'* – in an extreme life situation such as Auschwitz and even in the face of one's death in a gas chamber. May from unimaginable suffering spring forth a growing awareness of life's unconditional meaningfulness.[55]

To support his argument Frankl draws attention to the fact that, studying reasons for suicide, it does not matter whether a person is poor or rich, in a state of basic survival or in a situation of socio-economic abundance. If there is no meaning, persons are inclined to take their lives independently of their well-being.

> It had been overlooked or forgotten that if a person has found the meaning sought for, he is prepared to suffer, to offer sacrifices, even, if need be, to give his life for the sake of it. Contrariwise, if there is no meaning he is inclined to take his life, and he is prepared to do so even if all his needs, to all appearances, have been satisfied.[56]

A survey of suicide attempts in the midst of welfare states highlights exactly this correlation. Even in situations where the socio-economic conditions are satisfying and the struggle for survival has disappeared, a new struggle emerges, which one could express with the question: Survival for what?[57]

These observations result in the conviction that each situation in life is unique with a unique meaning. To avoid any misconception, this concept of meaning has nothing to do with the notions of fate, destiny or a belief in a divine determined plan. Rather it indicates the possibility of a human being to find and attribute a concrete

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[55] Ibid., 34-5.
[56] Ibid., 20.
[57] Frankl vigorously attempts to unmask the dangers of nihilism and reductionism. Two statements are very illuminating: 'Nihilism unmasks itself not by talking about nothingness but rather by its phrase "nothing than".' 'Reductionism I could define as a pseudoscientific procedure by which specific human phenomena are reduced to sub-human phenomena or deduced from them. In this way reductionism could be defined as sub-humanism': *Ärztliche Seelsorge*, 47. [My translation.]

meaning to a particular situation in life. For Frankl, life is never lacking a meaning and to this meaning, which is always open and never determined in advance, a human being can respond, make his own choice and confront this situation with a unique response. However, this in turn is only a real possibility if there is a *beyond* the mere facts of biological and psychological determinism. Therefore, Frankl speaks of "freedom in spite of determinism" and leaves the concept of the human being open. One must not conceive of it as a closed system. Otherwise, again, one would be left alone with causes and effects represented by conditioned reflexes and drives and instincts. This view is strongly supported by Frankl's professional encounter with criminals, who, 'at least once the judgement has been past, do not wish to be regarded as mere victims of psychodynamic mechanisms or conditioning process. ... To explain his guilt away by looking at him as the victim of circumstances also means taking away his human dignity. I would say that it is a prerogative of man to become guilty. To be sure, it also is his responsibility to overcome guilt.'[58] If this freedom in spite of determinism is denied, being is reduced to a thing and being human is de-humanized. Frankl summarizes his findings as follows:

> We departed from determinism as a limitation of freedom and have arrived at humanism as an expansion of freedom. Freedom is part of the story and half of the truth. Being free is but the negative aspect of the whole phenomenon whose positive aspect is being responsible. Freedom may degenerate into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibleness.[59]

The relatedness of every human being to meaning makes their responses real responses – in spite of many acts and attitudes which can be explained by drives or conditioned processes – and thus responsibility a genuine characteristic of being human. The following graph by Elisabeth Lukas[60] illustrates some basic features and shows how it is a vital characteristic of human beings to respond to meaning in every concrete life situation.

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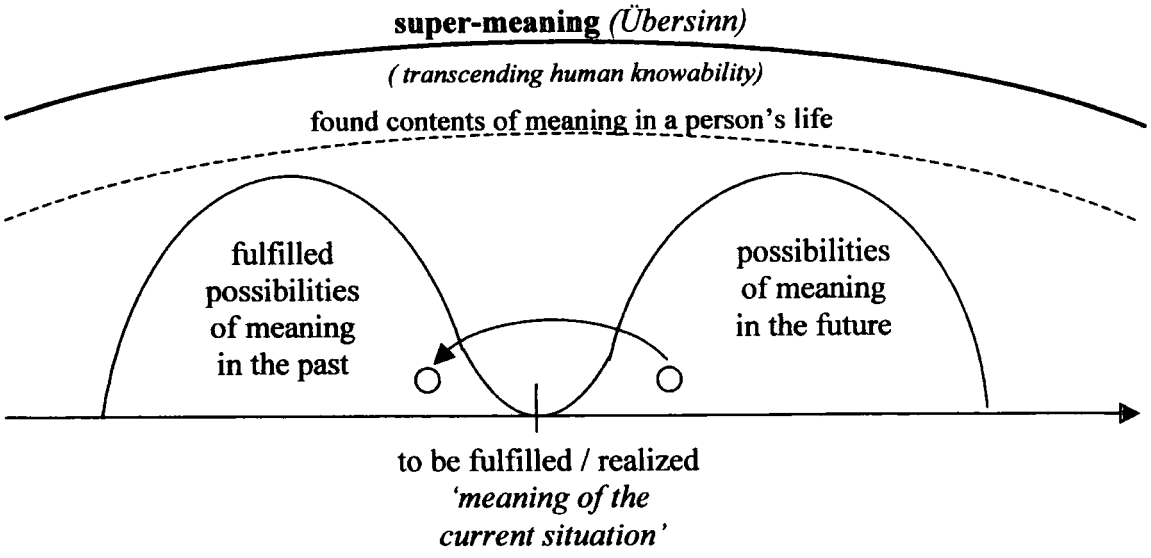
[58] *Unheard Cry*, 51.
[59] Ibid., 60.
[60] *Rendevouz mit dem Leben*, 13. [My translation.]



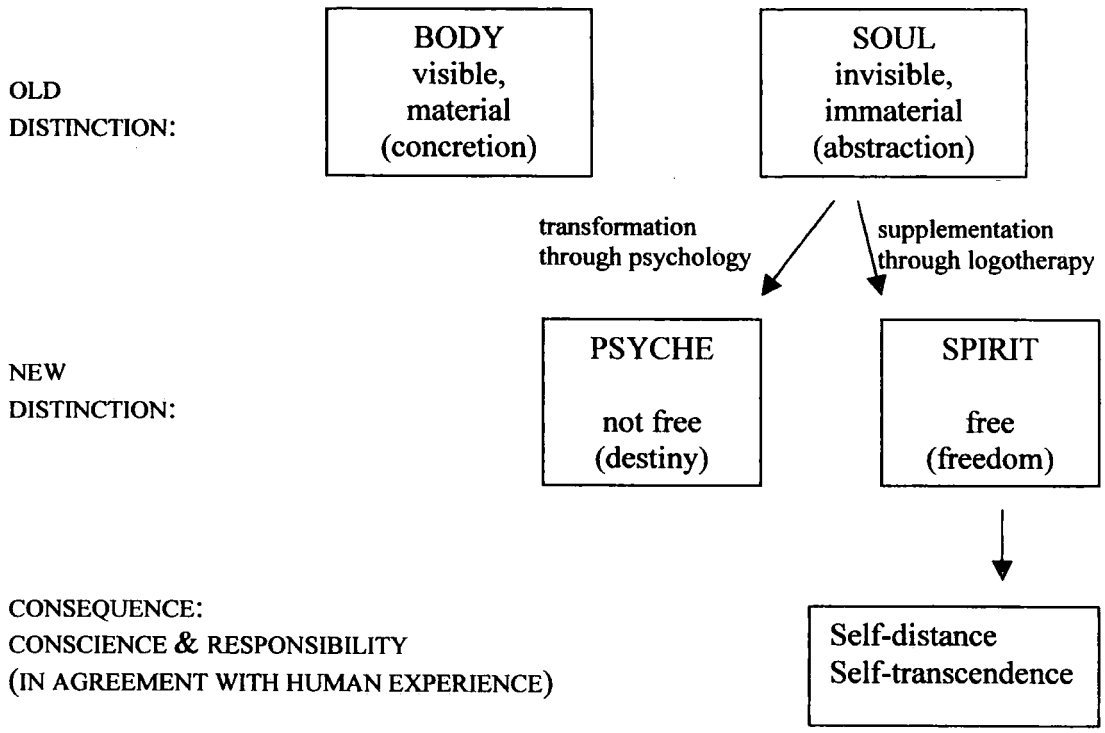
Graph 5: Logotherapy's concept of meaning

3.4.1.3 Conscience and self-distance

The will to meaning and the characteristic of responsibleness are further developed and explored within the concept of conscience representing the spiritual dimension of human beings through which they are capable of self-distance and self-transcendence.[61] The freedom of human will consists of '*being free from driven by an Id*' and '*being free to be responsible*' and thus having a conscience.[62] The experience of conscience where people are facing their faculty of self-distance and self-relation as a place within themselves, being able to argue and judge themselves, can be understood as the possibility of being responsible. But human conscience can only be such a possibility if it is the place where human beings transcend their *I* and thus perceive their existence from outside themselves. Therefore the dialogue that is proceeding within a human conscience about one's self-understanding has to be a real dialogue and not just talk with oneself. If the concept of human conscience were not an open concept, then all distinctions between ego and self or between *I* and *Id* would ultimately be a non-distinction. Frankl claims that the concept of conscience is only intelligible as a transcending concept and that we have to perceive the human being from his

[61] Eschmann, *Theologie der Seelsorge*, 96.
[62] Frankl, *Der unbewußte Gott. Psychotherapie und Religion* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988), 39.

creatureliness and his relation to a meaningful transcendence.[63] This leads him to the revision of the distinction between body and psyche by adding a spiritual dimension. Up to his time psychoanalysis transformed the traditional notion of the soul into the "psyche" as the locus for our drives, instincts, perceptions, memories and so on. But this mere substitution of soul with psyche made it impossible to integrate the experience of self-transcendence and the notion of freedom as expressions that move beyond determinism. For this reason, Frankl supplements and completes the concept with the notion of "spirit". The following diagram[64] illustrates the amendment which integrates the spiritual dimension as a characteristic of being human.



Graph 6: Logotherapy's distinction between psyche and spirit

This concept helps to conceive the notion of responsibility in a way appropriate to human experience. For Frankl, the human conscience is the place where the spiritual dimension can be experienced. It functions as a sense organ, or better, as an organ for meaning. Human being (*menschliches Sein*) points outside itself, it points to meaning. He understands human being profoundly as responsible being (*Verantwortlichsein*) and

[63] Ibid., 40-1.
[64] Adaptation from Lukas, *Rendevouz mit dem Leben*, 155.

thus Logotherapy as an analysis towards being responsible.[65] Every responsibility of being there (*Daseinsverantwortung*) is a responsibility "ad personam" and "ad situationem".[66] In comparison and as a clear distinction from Freud and his followers he emphasizes that what becomes conscious within Logotherapy is not an "Id" or a "drive", but my *I*. In other words, the ego faces itself and becomes conscious of itself; it finds the way back and finds itself.[67] Frankl does not at all deny either the factors that limit our freedom or the embeddedness of a human person in a special situation, which determines the ego to a certain degree in a particular way. But despite all determinism, in which a person is always tangled up, the ego remains responsible. Through the transcending concept of conscience and the existence of ultimate meaning (at the level of *Übersinn*) human persons are capable of finding concrete meaning for their own lives and as a result are also responsible for it. This responsiveness to meaning manifests itself on three levels of experience.

In this context Frankl speaks about different values. Three categories of values can be distinguished which show that human beings are capable of both finding meaning in every life situation and responding to it. There are creative values (*schöpferische Werte*), experiential values (*Erlebniswerte*), and attitude or belief values (*Einstellungswerte*). While creative values display the possibility of finding meaning in work and creative action and experiential values point to the fact that meaning and fulfilment can be found in the beauty of the natural world, in social interactions, or in the arts, values of attitude point to the vital insight that human beings even in utter despair and where they cannot change their destiny are still capable of responding to such a situation by taking up a certain attitude or belief.[68] If all three levels are kept together, then human life, Frankl concludes, 'can never become meaningless: the life of human beings maintain their meaning even "in ultimis" – therefore as long as they breathe, as long as they are conscious, they remain responsible in the light of these values - even if they are only values of attitude or belief.'[69]

Frankl's concept of conscience supports the experience that human persons are to a certain degree always free due to their capacity for self-distance and thus are able to engage in a proper dialogue with life and its meaning. To express this trait of being

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[65] *Der unbewußte Gott*, 12.
[66] Ibid., 13.
[67] Ibid., 14.
[68] For example attitudes like bravery in situations of suffering or dignity and self-respect in situations of failure, destruction or death.
[69] *Ärztliche Seelsorge*, 93. [My translation.]

human Frankl also sometimes speaks of the *unconscious God,* which he circumscribes as an existent transcendent meaning for every person. Human persons are not totally determined either by their genes or by their biographies but remain free and thus can find meaning in their lives. They are responsible and always capable of starting anew and being open for changes.[70] The notions of meaning and responsibility orient the human person toward an always open future, toward hope. Persons are not only what they have become through their past but they are also what they still can become.

In conclusion then, according to Frankl and the contemporary representatives of Logotherapy,[71] true humanness transcends the biological and psychological dimensions. This is based on the experience of the will to meaning which indicates the possibility of *responding* to life in each new situation. Three constitutive characteristics, therefore, form an inseparable unity, meaning, responsibility, and transcendence. The balance between them must be maintained. As a consequence human relationality has to be conceived of as the relation and interdependency between *biological and psychological facts* and *the beyond.* Otherwise every concept of being human would ultimately lead to absolute determinism which is a form of nihilism, negating the basic experience that life '*is a life-long question-and-answer period*' and that '*[r]esponding* to life means *being responsible* for our lives.'[72]

3.4.2 Weizsäcker: The theory of *Gestaltkreis*

3.4.2.1 The significance of the subject

'To inquire into living things one has to take part in life. Physics is only objective, the biologist is also subjective. Dead things are alien to each other, living beings are, even in hostility, social.'[73] With this statement one can already breathe Viktor von Weizsäcker's conviction that the human sciences are rooted in life and cannot abstract from it. Weizsäcker's whole attention as a medical doctor and a psychotherapist in the

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[70] Eschmann, *Theologie der Seelsorge*, 114.

[71] Frankl comments that since his concept was introduced in 1949, 'it has been empirically corroborated and validated by several authors, using tests and statistics. The Purpose-in-Life (PIL) Test devised by James C. Crumbaugh and Leonard T. Maholik, and Elisabeth S. Lukas's Logo-Test have been administered to thousands of subjects, and the computerized data leave no doubt that the will to meaning is real': *Unheard Cry*, 31.

[72] *Unheard Cry*, 110.

[73] Viktor v. Weizsäcker, *Der Gestaltkreis. Theorie der Einheit von Wahrnehmen und Bewegen*, Gesammelte Schriften 4 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1997), 295. Hereafter: [*Gestaltkreis*]. All following English quotations in this section from German sources are my own translation.

middle of the twentieth century was drawn to the concept of person in order to explore the development of illnesses and malfunctions of human persons that led him to the profound biological concept of GESTALTKREIS.[74] It is his conviction that unless we integrate the notion of the subject into our scientific research the concept of being human will be one-sided and out of balance. There is no subject-independent objectivism in natural processes. The scientist and observer is always a co-player in the complex process of discerning and understanding natural phenomena.[75] It has to be taken into consideration that all human acts as biological acts are unities of perception and movement, disclosing a deep psycho-physical dynamic. Interested in medical anthropology, Weizsäcker integrates the notion of the subject into biology and links the psychological moment of being human with the physical moment of his anatomical-physiological research. Illnesses, for instance, cannot merely be seen as somatic or psychological malfunctions presupposing the Cartesian distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* due to which the human being is divided into two objective realms soul and body. Illnesses are meaningful events and therefore are always also expressions of biographical crises.[76] In other words, the strength of Weizsäcker's work is that his research includes vast numbers of physical, physiological, and psychological experiments and studies which are brought into correlation with his experience and encounter with patients as a medical doctor. This leads him to the notion of encounter (*Begegnung, Umgang*) as the basic category for understanding every biological act. Thus his theory of GESTALTKREIS unites biological, medical and philosophical questions and thus is a very profound contribution towards an understanding of what it means to be human.

3.4.2.2 The biological act: perception and movement

To be a living being, from a biological perspective, means to move and perceive at the same time in every moment of life. We cannot do anything without feeling and

[74] There is no exact translation for the notion of GESTALTKREIS. As a guideline I suggest 'circle of form, appearance and shape'.

[75] Cf. Walter Schindler, 'Anthropologische Medizin – heute? Anmerkungen zur unzeitgemäßen Aktualität Viktor von Weizsäckers', in *Zur Aktualität Viktor von Weizsäckers* (hereafter: [*ZAVW*]), Beiträge zur Medizinischen Anthropologie, Band 1 (Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neuman, 2003), 19-39. Schindler also refers to Weizsäcker's indebtedness to Niels Bohr's interpretation of Quantum theory: 'Im Bereich atomarer Prozesse zeigt sich, daß die Ortsmessung eines Teilchens nicht zugleich eine scharfe Impulsmessung erlaubt. Wenn also exklusiv gilt, daß entweder eine genaue Orts- oder ein scharfe Impulsmessung möglich ist, dann ist die Objektbestimmung, also die Objektivität der Beobachtung, von der Wahl des experimentierenden Beobachters abhängig' (p.25).

[76] Schindler, 'Anthropologische Medizin – heute?', *ZAVW*, 21-4.

perceiving and we cannot feel and perceive without carrying out a motorial act. Whatever we do, even if we 'do nothing', we are moving because, from a physiological perspective, movement (*Bewegung*) is taking place – we are employing muscles or other organs: a physical performance is being realized. At the same time movement is inseparably linked with perception (*Wahrnehmung*), which cannot merely be described as a function of the sense organs but is also a function of our mind transcending a purely physical explanation. Whatever we do, see, or observe - and even if we are blind or deaf, our senses "see and feel" – we perceive ourselves and our environment with our mind, which displays the psychological moment of being human. In opposition to a purely physical and physiological approach to the biological act, Weizsäcker shows that perception and movement are inseparably connected with each other. The biological dynamic cannot be properly explained with the theories of physical forces, physiological stimuli or impulses and psychological drives, which ground on the law of cause and effect. Rather an explanation of the biological act is in need of a holistic view, integrating physiological and psychological research, not forgetting that the study of the biological act always compels the medical doctor not to deny the subjective aspect of every investigation.

An examination of biological acts, like going, standing or seeing, shows that human beings are connected with their environment through certain relations which become manifest in the two notions of perception and movement. To get a first idea of what Weizsäcker means, it is helpful to look at one of his examples in which he describes the event of a person observing a butterfly.[77] When we look at a person who observes a butterfly we may assume first of all that the picture of the butterfly glides over his retina. It follows a movement of the eyes in the direction the butterfly is taking, which is accompanied by movements of the head, the body and maybe by some steps. The aim and the success of this manifold employment of the muscles is always the same: it enables a continuous image of the butterfly on the retina. The movements (the physiological event) enable the observer to perceive psychologically. In virtue of this the observer remains in contact with the object. The coherence is only upheld precisely under this condition of movement. But at the same time, the psychological perception of the butterfly, out of many other options which can be perceived at this moment in the environment, forms the necessary condition for the particular employment of the muscles, which was mentioned above. The whole event of seeing the butterfly, is *one*

[77] *Gestaltkreis*, 110.

act and only made possible through *perceiving and moving* as a physiological-psychological dynamic. Perception and movement mutually interpenetrate each other so that one can say:

> Through moving I let a perception appear, or, through perceiving something a movement becomes present to me.[78]

3.4.2.3 Conditions of perception

Having drawn attention to this interdependence of perception and movement in every biological act, I would now like to highlight separately, first, some conditions of human perception and, secondly, some of human movement. To start off with the butterfly example can help because it emphasises that human perception, which is always a perception of something particular, does not take place in a laboratory but within the environment. The person who observed the butterfly could also have chosen something else to look at or pay attention to. But she limits herself to seeing the butterfly, which in turn determines her movement. This entails two consequences. First, it means that it is vital for a specific perception to take place that persons place themselves within the environment at a particular moment and focus on a particular object. Second, it follows that the concrete perception depends precisely on this placing oneself within the environment.[79] This can be easily shown by referring to two trains that stop at a station on neighbouring tracks. Sitting in one of the trains it is possible to perceive one's own or the other train starting to move depending on one's present inner order or perception of objects. The perception of the environment (trains, compartment, assessment of time, etc.) and how I relate to them and which particularities I contemplate, determine which of the trains I see moving.

At this point Weizsäcker makes a distinction between the physical-mathematical and the biological integration of space and time. While the former has a constant and unmoveable reference system of space within time, the latter is always changing. Physics tries to integrate everything in a firm system and look at things from the outside, treating them as mere objects.[80] But biological integration is only possible for a

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[78] Weizsäcker, quoted in Wyss, *Die tiefenpsychologischen Schulen von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, 306: 'Indem ich mich bewege, lasse ich eine Wahrnehmung erscheinen, oder, indem ich etwas wahrnehme, wird mir eine Bewegung gegenwärtig.'

[79] *Gestaltkreis*, 112.

[80] At this point Weizsäcker is not making statements about relativity-theory and cosmology. His criticism is directed against the natural-scientific presuppositions within medicine, i.e., against an assumed objectivism and the principle of deterministic causality, which is often even maintained when medicine

short period until its reference system alters. The reference system of a biological performance of perception is continuously being changed and replaced.[81] A subject always places itself anew within its environment. A new movement entails another perception of the environment (the reference system of space and time) and a new perception entails new movements and physiological behaviour in order to adjust to this new framework. The correlation between perception and object is not settled or arranged *a priori*. It always has to be reaffirmed in every moment of life. For example, a seen square is not necessarily related to a square object; or a square object is not automatically seen and perceived as a square.[82]

This leads to a further characteristic, namely the predicative essence of perception. Perceiving means that one never sees "*ein Ding an sich*", but always sees something in particular and never the whole. Perception always chooses between objective possibilities and thus creates its own limited environment. Regarding this it can be maintained that perception is a continuous and repetitive process of perceiving particularities. I see a house (in the garden), but then the windows (of the house in the garden), then the pane (of the window of the house in the garden), etc. Perception is always experiencing so that one can always ask the question: What did I experience? And not, what is right or wrong. Human perception always goes on, never stops, happens as an event and does not know the firm anchor of physical objects in space and time.[83]

Closely linked to this observation is the characteristic of what Weizsäcker calls the *Antilogik*. To explain this term he employs the following example.[84] If one looks down the railway tracks the observer will see a convergence although the gauge appears at every point the same. The mathematical law of parallelism is abrogated in the act of seeing. However, nobody would say that he sees an objective decline of the gauge and nobody would deny that he sees a convergence. We see the tracks in relation to us as near and distant and the perception of this depth effect includes the impression of

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allows some space for psychological explanations. Weizsäcker argues: 'Während in der Voraussetzung der Physik der Gegenstand auch unabhängig vom Ich existieren würde, ist der Gegenstand der Biologie überhaupt nur denkbar, wenn wir mit ihm ein Handgemenge eingehen; seine unabhängige Existenz ist nicht voraussetzbar': *Gestaltkreis*, 295. Cf. Schindler, 'Anthropologische Medizin – heute?', *ZAVW*, 21: 'Diese Ontologie der klassischen Naturwissenschaft leitet die Medizin auch, insofern sie Seelisches im Krankheitsgeschehen berücksichtigt; sie redet dann von psychogenen Krankheiten. Schon die Diagnose „psychog*ene* Angina" interpretiert die Krankheit gemäß dem Schema der Kausalität.'

[81] *Gestaltkreis*, 112.

[82] *Gestaltkreis*, 220.

[83] *Gestaltkreis*, 202-4.

[84] *Gestaltkreis*, 227-8.

parallelism although the image of convergence is still there. This fact Weizsäcker calls the *Antilogik* within the act of perception.[85]

Weizsäcker concludes that perception is not a subjective final product but has to be understood as an act in becoming and a happening encounter (*geschehende Begegnung*) between an I and its environment.[86] Human beings perceive things necessarily in a way in which they have to appear under a present condition. Perceptions are appearances of real things through real organs. Therefore perceptions cannot be understood either as organic or as inorganic but must be seen as a unique encounter between the I and the environment, constantly fused and combined with movement. This act is a process in which every step is followed by a new one which cannot be predicted in advance.

3.4.2.4 Conditions of movement

The theory of GESTALTKREIS, which will be explained in the next section, uses the notion of 'circle' especially to oppose the classical law of cause and effect, which assumes that there is, in physiological terms, first a stimulus which then is followed by an effect, for example, the movement of a particular muscle. In this case the reference to time and to the one-after-the-other is an important condition for speaking of causality. But if one explores the conditions of movement of human beings in correlation with space and time, one has to draw different conclusions. Weizsäcker employs an everyday example.[87] When I cross a busy street while a lorry is coming closer, I determine my speed not due to some actual sense-stimuli which reach my eye, but due to the anticipation of the lorry which approaches me at a certain speed. The stimulus, which has to prevent me from choosing a certain walking speed, would be the anticipated collision which is not yet given. The anticipation which determines my walking speed, thus, refers to the future and not to the past. This fact Weizsäcker calls the anticipation of the effect.

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[85] Weizsäcker's choice of the term „Antilogik" is not the best. It must not be confused with formal logic. "Antilogik" in connection with living beings alludes to basic paradoxes in human life, which means in our perception there are opposed counterparts (experiences) which both are valid in their affirmation and in their negation.

[86] *Gestaltkreis*, 219.

[87] *Gestaltkreis*, 255.

A similar observation can be made if circular motions of human beings are investigated,[88] for example, the drawing of a circle with a finger in the air. The shape of such a circle will be determined by a person's particular anticipation of the circular form. Here one is confronted with the correlation between shape and time. What biology finds is that similar shapes have to be realized in the same time and this similarity cannot be deduced from a mechanic construction of the movement but only from an anticipation of the effect in every part of the whole movement. This observation exhibits an essential difference between physics and biology. While the construction of the rotation of the planets is the result of a constant interrelation of forces, within the organic movement the *circular shape* is the precondition for a particular construction of forces in a certain period of time. This entails the important and indispensable insight that organic movement is *proleptic movement*, depending on the anticipation of the movement, which in turn is a function of perception. Only the actual execution decides the concrete form of the movement.[89] Organic movement, therefore, is not merely a succession of cause and effect, but includes a decision.[90]

3.4.2.5 Gestaltkreis

According to these studies Weizsäcker's theory of GESTALTKREIS is an attempt to give all these observations due stress and to underline human relationality. The symbol of the circle stresses mainly three points. First, the unity and inseparable interdependence of perception and movement in every single biological act, second, the openness of this process – it is the continuous flow of life in which all persons have to find themselves in every event anew – and, third, the unity of the I and its environment despite its difference. Although every human being stands opposite its environment, it is also part of it and only due to an encounter between the I and its environment that perception and movement is being realized. In view of this the notion of GESTALTKREIS defines the unity of the subject with its environment, which it creates constantly by moving and perceiving.[91]

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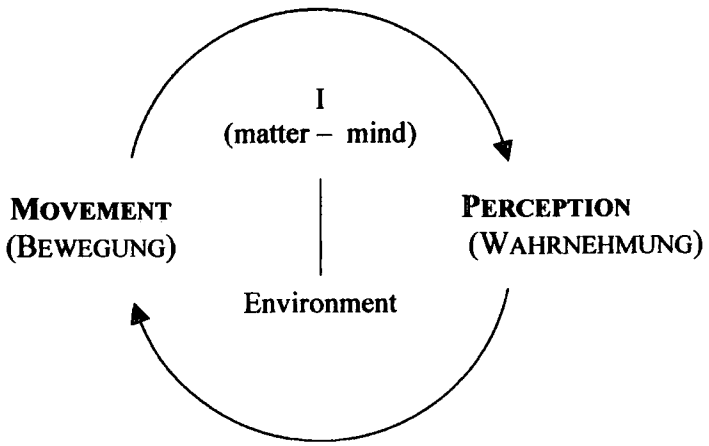
[88] *Gestaltkreis*, 258.
[89] *Gestaltkreis*, 274.
[90] *Gestaltkreis*, 264.
[91] Weizsäcker, quoted in Wyss, *Die tiefenpsychologischen Schulen*, 306.



Graph 7: Weizsäcker's Gestaltkreis

To avoid any misunderstanding, Weizsäcker is clear about the fact that the image of the GESTALTKREIS is not a new scientific methodology. What he wants to highlight is that the relation between matter and mind, movement and perception, I and environment *is not* strictly causal and deterministic. The relationship between body and soul or between two subjects must not be seen as a connection between two separate entities. It rather illuminates the character of *mutual representation* and substitution.[92] Within the realm of medical anthropology body and soul cannot simply be presupposed as two basic substances. Body and soul are not a tight unity but rather they inseparably live with, deal with, and encounter one another.[93] This then points to a *mutual hiddenness or concealment* between body and soul (movement and perception) within our scientific processes. If one focuses on the somatic dimension, the psychological dimension slides into the background and is hidden from the methods of physiological investigation and vice versa. In this sense there is a certain kind of methodological indeterminism, which, for Weizsäcker, is not the abandonment of scientific research and explanation but highlights the importance of the human sciences taking seriously the notion of the subject. In the GESTALTKREIS the notion of the subject is therefore inseparably connected with the notion of the world. Self-being (*Selbstsein*) and self-movement

[92] Schindler, 'Anthropologische Medizin – heute?', *ZAVW*, 26-8.

[93] Mechthilde Kütemeyer has highlighted the relevance of Weizsäcker's insights in relation to the phenomenon of pain, which, she argues, shakes every theory of causality. Every pain is psycho-somatic and exhibits an amalgamation of nerve sensation and psychological perception leading sometimes to paradox phenomena such as the absence of pain despite severe bodily damage or the experience of pain where "nothing is wrong" with the patient: 'Ärztlicher Umgang mit Schmerzen und Schmerzkranken. Schmerz im Rahmen einer subjektiven Neurologie', *ZAVW*, 55-74.

(*Selbstbewegung*) is a being in togetherness and exists within a context of motion between living beings in a common world.[94] This dialectic shows, for instance when someone is ill, that there are certainly rules (physical and psychological insights and theories), which help to recognize states of affairs and to predict certain future developments, but that at the same time subsequent moves and countermoves cannot be clearly determined in advance.[95]

The relevance of this theory can be illuminated by an analogy with a game of chess.[96] A player of chess is an observer and a theorist. He knows the rules but he cannot explain the moves of his opponent by these rules. Rather it is important that he presumes and anticipates possible moves and then awaits the execution. Did he know the moves, there would not be a game at all. The realization of the game depends precisely on compliance with the rules and upon the freedom of the move, that is to say, the correlation of supposition and observation and not upon the correlation of cause and effect reflecting a particular law. Exactly under the condition of this indefiniteness of the opponent's move does a game of chess exist. It is this indefiniteness which is the real condition of this event.

What can be learnt from this analogy? Perception is *concrete* perception. In the event of perceiving an objective possibility is being realized. Organic movement is anticipated movement. Only the execution itself decides upon the concretion. In terms of the GESTALTKREIS, every act of perceiving and moving is carried out under the condition of such productive encounter between an I and its environment.[97] This then is also the condition for the generation of real events, for the *being* of concrete and actual life.[98]

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[94] Reiner Wiehl summarizes Weizsäcker's notion of subjectivity: 'Subjektivität bedeutet nicht nur Selbstbeziehung eines lebendigen Individuums und Selbstbewegung in dieser Selbstbeziehung; auch nicht nur Selbstsein und Selbstbewegung in der Beziehung auf anderes und in dem Bewegungszusammenhang mit anderem. Subjektivität bedeutet über dies beides hinaus: Selbstsein und Selbstbewegung im Zusammensein und im Bewegungszusammenhang mit anderem in einer gemeinsamen Welt; und Verhalten zu dieser Welt im Verhalten zu sich und zu anderen. Hier ist der Subjektbegriff mit dem Weltbegriff verbunden': 'Form und Gestalt im „Gestaltkreis". Zur philosophischen Begriffssprache in Viktor von Weizsäckers Medizinischer Anthropologie', *ZAVW*, 171.

[95] Hans Stoffels also refers to the proximity of Weizsäcker's *Gestaltkreis* to Uexküll's notion of *Situationskreis*. 'Eine Situation ist weder durch die Eigenschaften des Subjekts noch durch die objektiven Gegebenheiten allein definiert, sondern nur dadurch, wie gut oder wie schlecht beide zueinander passen und sich zu einem raumzeitlichen Gebilde ergänzen, zu einer belebten Bühne, die Lebens- und Überlebenschancen bietet': 'Situationskreis und Situationstherapie. Überlegungen zu einem integrativen Konzept von Psychotherapie', *ZAVW*, 94.

[96] *Gestaltkreis*, 273.

[97] *Gestaltkreis*, 274.

[98] For an illuminating discussion of the significance of Weizsäcker's work in relation to modern neuroscience and brain research: Peter Henningsen, 'Kognitive Neurowissenschaft als "Umgangslehre." Ein aktuelles Erklärungsmodell für die Medizin?', *ZAVW*, 103-25.

From this perspective the notion of balance emerges and becomes important as a term of identity, namely the biological identity of a living being in his environment. The notion of biological balance indicates the mutual relation between an organic unity and its environment.[99] To give an example, one might look at the maintenance of our body balance. As long as our perception of the environment and the correlating movement and vice versa build a unity, we will keep our body balance. Our biological identity is correct and makes sense. But once we lose this unity, for example through a false perception of the height of a step or a hole in the street, our movement will simultaneously correlate to this perception and we will fall. The biological balance, our identity in correlation with the environment, is lost for a tiny moment.

The consequence of this concept is that the so called object of an investigation or experiment is not an object or thing which merely faces the subject but that the object itself is a subject which enters into a relation with another subject. The unity of perception and movement discloses in the biological act itself, the aspects of freedom and determinism, decision and necessity. Life therefore is always original, acts can be similar but they are never the same. Life is social because human beings are embedded in their environment and the perception and movement of others influence and determine their lives. The theory of GESTALTKREIS thus expresses the fact that every biological act, which can be called the basic event of being alive, is not intelligible and would not at all be possible without the environment and the other. Weizsäcker shows that not the *I* but the *We* and thus the *being in relation* (*Begegnung – Umgang*) is the ultimate foundation for human life. Herewith his biological endeavour points into the same direction as the philosophical personalism of Buber.[100] However, this being-in-relation as the ground for our lives is not itself an object of scientific investigation but rather points to a transcendent dimension of human life. Being alive and living within an inseparable connection and interdependence between both body and soul on the individual level and I and environment on the social level corresponds to a basic characteristic of being human, namely 'that we are in a dependence with all living creatures, whose ground itself cannot become an object of human knowledge.'[101]

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[99] *Gestaltkreis*, 290-1.
[100] Wyss, *Die tiefenpsychologischen Schulen*, 308.
[101] Weizsäcker, quoted in Schindler, 'Anthropologische Medizin – heute?', *ZAVW*, 29.

3.4.2.6 'Antilogisch' and 'pathisch' existence

Weizsäcker's theory of GESTALTKREIS allows him to introduce other notions drawn from life-experience in order to form his concept of person. The basic experience underlying his concept and the main focus on the subject is from the perspective of the human experience of illness as a crisis.[102] This approach follows from his emphasis on every biological act as crisis, that a living being has to keep up his biological balance and find its identity in relation with the environment. Although most of the time this does not become a problem for a person, from a biological viewpoint every biological act can be seen as an adjustment to new perceptions and movements. To that degree human persons always have to find their identity and therefore are exposed to crises. If this balance cannot be found for a certain period of time, one can also psychologically properly speak of a crisis: a person is divided, cannot be perceived as a unity. But persons who are able to endure, struggle through and in the end overcome a crisis, facing the questions of meaning and nothingness, existence and non-existence, experience a deep change in themselves and gain meaning and life - a new identity is found. However, a subject does not entirely possess itself; rather it constantly has to acquire itself, has to suffer crises and insofar to re-acquire itself as something always new. According to this view a subject consists of the following two moments: i) the GESTALTKREIS, which is not understandable without the subject as constituted by the unity of movement and perception, and ii) the *crisis*. Only through the crisis, which threatens the identity of the subject and questions all unity and freedom, when endured and overcome, the subject remains one and finds itself again and again.[103] At this point Weizsäcker contributes a philosophical notion to the discussion. Over and above the notions of space, time, number and causality, he tries to conceive a person within the categories of ANTILOGISCH, PATHISCH and UMGANG. The first two are especially novel and need attention because with them he deliberately wants to enhance the understanding of being human.

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[102] For a medical anthropology, which obviously is very suggestive for any theological concept of pastoral care, these insights have vital significance for Weizsäcker overcomes the reductive and false dichotomy between "healthy" and "ill". Illness (or crisis) then is not a defect of being human (as if there is such a thing as a definable healthy or correct psycho-somatic human condition) but rather a way of being human (*eine Weise des Menschseins*). For some illuminating practical examples from hospital experience emphasising the importance of Weizsäcker's medical anthropology: Dieter Janz, 'Anthropologische Erfahrungen in der Klinik', *ZAVW*, 41-53.

[103] Wyss, *Die tiefenpsychologischen Schulen*, 310.

With the notion of ANTILOGISCH, which he had already used as a characteristic of human movement and perception,[104] he now defines the paradox within human life-experience which no metaphysics can solve. A typical ANTILOGISCH example would be that human beings can say that they are becoming and simultaneously that they are vanishing. Events like birth and death are ANTILOGISCH events.[105] ANTILOGISCH statements within the realm of human experience are not contradictory in a way they are within formal logic, but they are paradoxical, they are valid in their affirmation and in their negation. With this term Weizsäcker not only wants to emphasize that different forms and expressions within the realm of "living things" in their general terminological descriptions conflict with one another but also that already the ordering of their relation to each other exhibits a basic problem.[106] Living experience cannot be pressed into the corset of unchangeable forms. Living experience always reaches beyond the perception of forms. Consequently, statements, experiences, or notions that seem in the first place as opposed to each other, can be conceived as belonging together, as ANTILOGISCH within the framework of GESTALTKREIS, in which opposed notions or experiences both are true, and only together build the unity of human life.

A further consequence of this approach is the second category, which he calls DAS PATHISCHE. Here, Weizsäcker argues that it is not ontology or metaphysics that determine life but passion because within the framework of GESTALTKREIS a person is basically bound to his situation which always contains the possibility of the ANTILOGISCH dynamic. Only in the reality of this dialectic, of joy and despair, of happiness and guilt a person experiences life. The notion 'ontic' merely defines pure being, i.e., that someone or something just *is*. But if that what *is* is a unity of movement and perception, and if *being* precisely means finding oneself through crises and the constantly flowing process of self-understanding and gaining identity, then the ontological category is insufficient. To be alive means to have a PATHISCH existence because a living subject is embedded in a context in which it acts and behaves *in* a world relating *to* the world. Subjectivity, therefore, is always subject to change in direct relation to the other and its environment. Subjectivity exhibits always a kind of

[104] Weizsäcker uses also the term "revolving door principle" (*Prinzip der Drehtür*), which means that movement and perception are related in mutual hiddenness. When I am concentrating on my perception my movement remains concealed from me and when I am focusing on my movement my perception remains concealed from me: *Gestaltkreis*, 124-5. See also above p.143: 'Through moving I let a perception appear, or, through perceiving something a movement becomes present to me.'
[105] Wyss, *Die tiefenpsychologischen Schulen*, 312.
[106] Reiner Wiehl, 'Form und Gestalt im Gestaltkreis', *ZAVW*, 184-5.

interstitial subjectivity.[107] Human beings are always in the midst of the GESTALTKREIS which means that they cannot clearly excavate the exact location of their subjectivity neither in regard to their organism nor with respect to their living experience as a continuing process.[108] The notion of PATHISCH subjectivity, therefore, describes both the in-betweenness of the human condition as crisis (highlighting that a person necessarily endures life, joy and suffering, and consequently *is*) and the openness of this condition within the fundamental interplay between determinism and freedom.

This ANTILOGISCH and PATHISCH existence is constitutive for the GESTALTKREIS. If human life is seen in terms of this, then life can never be possessed in its fullness, rather it has to be walked through and a person has to be *on the move* and endure its paradoxes and crises.

> The Gestaltkreis is essentially [redacted] an instruction for experiencing the living world. One cannot possess the Gestaltkreis in its integrity (...), rather one has to move through it and suffer its contrasts in a continuous process of *losing-sight-of* as well as *losing-the-effect* in order to gain something new. This condition can also be depicted in the following way, that we must *ceaselessly transcend* our possession, the presence and lose it in order to possess - but we can never totally possess because we always lose. *The biological act therefore is transcendent.*[109]

Here then, similar to Viktor Frankl's notion of meaning, the concept of GESTALTKREIS as the framework for human relationality and self-understanding points to a completion yet to come. But in this connection what is most vital to notice is that the concept of GESTALTKREIS due to the mutual interpenetration and interdependence of persons with persons and of persons with their environment entails decision and hence a concept of responsibility, which plays a key role in Weizsäcker's relation with his clients. It does matter how one decides and how one wills to perceive oneself, the environment and their mutual relation. Hence the concept of personhood can be depicted as a concept of *integrated otherness*, because otherness, either as another human person or another creature or the natural environment, through the framework of GESTALTKREIS, is always, though distinct, a part of myself. Through the constant interaction and ongoing interpenetration of *my* moving and perceiving with the moving and perceiving *of the*

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[107] This phrase is not found in Weizsäcker. It is used in connection with postcolonial thinkers describing the modern cultural condition as one of interstitiality, emphasizing that there is no purity to cultural identity and that we rather dwell at boundaries. Hence identity and subjectivity are without clear boundaries. We are not capable of totally defining what a subject is, where it starts and where it ends. I owe this reference to an unpublished paper for the AAR 2004: Michael Nausner, 'Boundary as Negotiation.' Cf. Michael Nausner, 'Der geöffnete Raum. Theologische Reflexionen über zwischenmenschliche Vergebung', *Theologie für die Praxis* 31 (2005), 114-26.

[108] Reiner Wiehl, 'Form und Gestalt im Gestaltkreis', *ZAVW*, 191.

[109] Weizsäcker, quoted in Peter Achilles, 'Anthropologische Medizin and humanistische Psychologie', *ZAVW*, 149.

other, I am. This *integrated otherness* reveals and supports the notion of crisis as a constitutive trait of being human and helps to explain the vital human experiences of longing for wholeness and searching for meaning as states of being in which the I finds its identity and hence can be itself.

Finally, to reach beyond Weizsäcker, if this description of the biological act as transcendent is correct, then it is directly correlated to the notion of fear as a basic trait of the human condition underlined earlier in this chapter.[110] From a psychological perspective one could say that fear is a crucial part of human life and lives within the GESTALTKREIS, more precisely, is the sister of the notion of crisis. The psychological phenomenon of fear then discloses the state of crises in which human beings find themselves in and indicates if they are able to keep up an appropriate balance between perception and movement, I and environment within an ANTILOGISCH and PATHISCH living experience.[111] When Fritz Riemann describes fear as something that accompanies us from birth to death and that fear signifies a basic condition of human life, this can be seen to illuminate Weizsäcker's notion of crisis from a psychological perspective. Riemann's four demands,[112] which exhibit the nourishing-ground of human fear and which every human being must learn to hold in balance, mirror Weizsäcker's ANTILOGISCH and PATHISCH description of the existence of human life. From a psychological perspective then, Weizsäcker's GESTALTKREIS with its inherent notion of crisis finds confirmation in Riemann's conceptualisation of human existence as a kind of interstitial identity, placed in-between the four demands for individuation, altruism, security, and change.

3.4.3 Levinas: The-One-for-the-Other

3.4.3.1 Beyond Heidegger

The strength of Levinas' philosophical contribution to our modern understanding of being and the conception of what it means to be human is his stress on the ethical. Philosophy, that is his conviction, begins with the meeting of the other and with responsibility. 'It is the other who is first, and there the question of my sovereign

[110] See above sections 3.2.2 – 3.2.6 and 3.3.2.
[111] For a discussion of fear with reference to Weizsäcker: Hinderik Emrich, 'Die existentielle Situation Angst. Herausforderung für die Medizinische Anthropologie als integrative Wissenschaft', *ZAVW*, 75-88.
[112] See above section 3.3.2. Cf. Riemann, *Grundformen der Angst*, 13-5.

consciousness is no longer the first question.'[113] With this emphasis Levinas' thought is deeply embedded in relationality and highlights the fact that there is no consciousness of the ego without the other who *is not* the same. There is a structure before all questioning, a structure which cannot be deduced from ontology, a structure which precedes the thematizing gaze of the ego's *I think*. He therefore criticises idealism and realism, which, in their dialectic method proceeding by question and answer around the *I think*, reduce the other to the same. But for Levinas subjectivity is not a modality of essence and cannot be reduced to the known, to the consciousness and to intentionality.[114] This is the reason why he had to depart from Husserl and Heidegger, his teachers in phenomenology. Before turning to a more detailed elaboration of Levinas' thought, it is therefore helpful to recall some main arguments of his discussion with Heidegger.

In Heidegger "to be" is perceived under the aspect of the fact that beings *are*. "The being" (*das Seiende*) is we ourselves and the being-ness (*das Sein*) of the being (des *Seienden*) is always mine. Consequently "to be" is the source of mineness (*Jemeinigkeit)*. In *Sein und Zeit* he writes:

> Das Sein, *darum* es diesem Seienden in seinem Sein geht, ist je meines... Das Ansprechen von Dasein muß gemäß dem Charakter der *Jemeinigkeit* dieses Seienden stets das *Personal*pronomen mitsagen: "ich bin", "du bist".[115]

Being determined by *Jemeinigkeit* is an assumption which Levinas has to reject because Heidegger's phenomenological studies, despite his profound existential analysis, reduce the other to the same. Levinas criticises the fact that Heidegger empties the distinction between subject and being of its meaning.[116] As a consequence notions like *transcendence* and *the other* are deprived of a deeper meaning. Due to the definition that being is determined by *Jemeinigkeit*, these notions are drawn into the intentional consciousness of the subject's *Dasein*, which is always a *Being-in-the-world*, a *Dasein-with-Others* and a *Being-towards-the-end*. Thus, the character of the encounter with the other is determined by the *Jemeinigkeit* of the *Dasein*. Although the *Being-in-the-world* of the I is always a *Being-with* the other, the other does not determine the *authenticity*, the *Eigentlichkeit* of being, the I's *Jemeinigkeit*. The Other as manifest in the *Being-*

[113] E. Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other* (London: The Athlone Press, 1998), 112.
[114] E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), 17.
[115] Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2001), 42. ET: J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 67-8: 'That Being which is an *issue* for this entity in its very Being, is in each case mine... Because Dasein has *in each case mineness* (Jemeinigkeit), one must always us a *personal* pronoun when one addresses it: "I am", "you are".'
[116] *Otherwise than Being*, 17.

with-Others is a mode of *Being-in-the-world*, but not as an indispensable character or mode of the essence of *Eigentlichkeit*.[117] In other words, Heidegger's remarks on the other, especially his notion of *Für-sorge (charitable concern)*, the "to-be-for-the-other", which is well treated in his existential analysis, remains a characteristic of the formal structure of the *Being-with* and not of the *Eigentlichkeit*. The other is only important as another being whose *Dasein* is also characterized by his or her *Jemeinigkeit*. The other becomes the same. This is the consequence of subordinating the relations between beings to the structures of being. Heidegger's *Miteinandersein*, although resting on the ontological relation, is grounded on the assumption that 'to relate to beings *qua* beings means to let beings be, to understand them as independent of the perception that discovers and grasps them.'[118]

It is here that one observes an inconsistency, which Levinas so emphatically emphasises. To understand the other being as independent and to let him be in his or her *Jemeinigkeit* presupposes a pre-understanding of the structure of being and assumes that what *I am* and what *Eigentlichkeit* means can be derived prior to the relation to the other being. This is a moment of egoism, where the consciousness of an I identical in its I think embraces all otherness and presupposes that there is a *presence* of the I think to the ego. This "being–present" is equivalent with being.[119] Consequently, otherness, the other or other things, can be grasped because they are always "zuhanden", they *are* present, leading Heidegger to the conclusion: '*Zuhandenheit ist die ontologisch-kategoriale Bestimmung von Seiendem, wie es "an sich" ist.*'[120] Here, otherness is conceived and synchronized in presence with the I think. Due to this temporal modality the other or other things appear for the *I think* as they *are* and thus represent being's essence. Levinas' critique is clear and intelligible. This understanding of alterity 'has been taken up by thought of the identical as *one's own* and, in so doing, of reducing one's *other* to the *same*. The other becomes the *I*'s very own in knowledge, which secures the marvel of immanence.'[121]

Furthermore, Heidegger's *Sein-zum-Tode (Being-towards-the-end)*, interpreted from the perspective of his *Being-in-the-world*, shapes the thought that '[m]it dem Tod steht sich das Dasein selbst in seinem eigensten Seinkönnen bevor... So sich

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[117] *Sein und Zeit*, 53, 118-25.
[118] *Entre Nous*, 6. Cf. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 118.
[119] Ibid., 160.
[120] *Sein und Zeit*, 71. 'Readiness-to-hand is the way in which entities as they are "in themselves" are defined ontologico-categorially': ET, 101.
[121] *Entre Nous*, 161.

bevorstehend sind in ihm alle Bezüge zu anderem Dasein gelöst.'[122] This shows, as Levinas argues, '[a]n authenticity of the most proper being-able-to-be and a dissolution of all-relations with the other!'[123] Here, it seems clear that Heidegger's concept of *Eigentlichkeit* as the ontological foundation of being is ultimately entirely independent of relations to the other. His approach has reduced phenomenology to ontology and subordinated metaphysical exploration to ontological absolutes. Thus it is impossible for a *beyond being* to take on meaning. Everything rests on the *Dasein* as *Being-in-the-world*, understood from the perspective of the intentional *I think*. For Levinas, this expresses a neglect of human relationality as a pre-condition for any philosophical investigation and a one-sidedness of the understanding of subjectivity which cannot be reduced to ontology and to the knowable of human consciousness.

3.4.3.2 Beyond being

This short discussion of Levinas' reaction to Heidegger has revealed his concern to go beyond reductionism. Levinas' philosophy is concerned with the reality of life as always being relational. There is no *I* without a *Thou* and thus no philosophy apart from this relation. There is no philosophical question without facing the other. The "what?" and "who?" can only be uttered because of a structure "before the questioning", which means that the possibility of response is already given before any cognitive subjectivity is possible.[124] To philosophise about being has to take this structure into consideration and therefore distinguish between being and subjectivity. Otherwise the *known* expresses the unity of being in the *I think*. But the experience of relationality, representing a structure of being "before the questioning" of any inquiry, entails the notion that the concept of *being* cannot be reduced to ontology conceived by the *I think* or deduced from the *I am*. Rather this relational structure in which the other is already always there signifies a *beyond subjectivity*, or an *otherwise than being*. This needs further consideration.

To understand being is to exist.[125] This short statement emphasises the fact that *being* is a noun and a verb at the same time. It indicates the ambiguity of being, on the one hand, its mode of designation as a noun, and on the other, its *beyond* designation as

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[122] *Sein und Zeit*, 250. 'With death, Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being... When it stands before itself in this way, all its relations to any other Dasein have been undone': ET, 294.
[123] *Entre Nous*, 214.
[124] *Otherwise than Being*, 26.
[125] *Entre Nous*, 3.

a verb which goes beyond the *said* indicating that in the *saying* being cannot be reduced to the said because it has always already slipped away. To inquire after *being* is only possible because we *are*, and to inquire means to ask the what-question. The phenomenological inquiry with its what-question is therefore at the beginning of all thought. However this questioning is only possible because of the appearances of being. But appearances understood as being's 'modes of being' are embedded in the thematizing gaze of the *I think*, they are always already correlated with a theme, a said. This is why appearances already dissimulate being in its very disclosure.[126] This fact indicates for Levinas that there 'is a problem preliminary to the question "who" and "what?"' and that '[t]he search for truth has to draw being out of appearances.'[127]

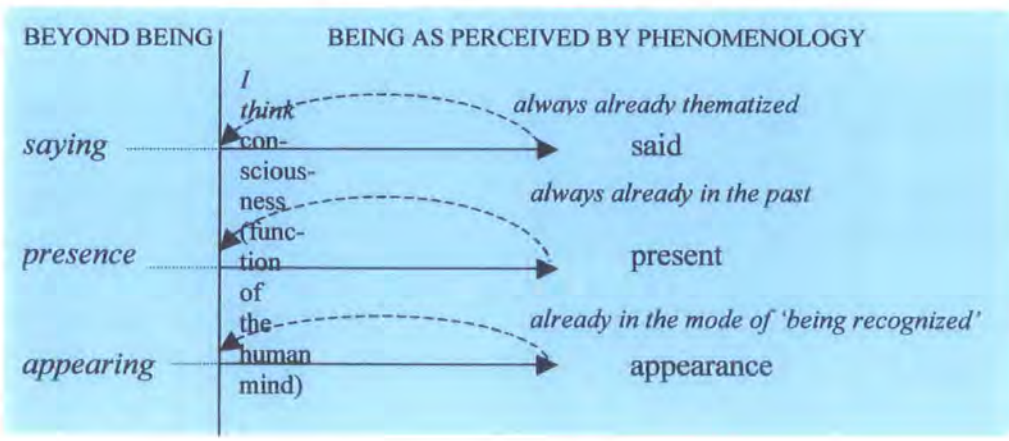
In order to do so, he introduces a distinction between *presence* and the *present* which correlates with the *saying* and the *said*. Phenomenological inquiry as a conscious act investigates into appearances that are always already in the past; they are always already in the mode of being recognized and of being thematized. *Present* for us, therefore, is always something or someone that has appeared. Once the appearing has appeared for us, it is grasped by the subjective self and consequently is already and always a said, indicating the designation of this something or someone. But the appearing as such (which includes a *for another* because appearing is only meaningful if there is another, hence implying a relational structure) precedes the object that has appeared. In view of this, if one understands the appearing as the manifestation of being and thus as the primary event, then it has to be said that '*the very primacy of the primary is in the presence of the present.*'[128] The present object as a present object in our conscious perception is not identical with the presence of the relational structure of the appearing, a presence that is the pre-condition for all ontological investigation. There is always an *already there,* the *before questioning* in the present which the *I am* tries to conceive with cognitive inquiry.

Phenomenological inquiry depends upon consciousness, language, sensation, and expression. But these human characteristics and tools of conceiving and understanding *being* are always correlated with a theme, that means with a present represented as a said. Consciousness depends on the what-question because it always relates to the past and consequently objectifies the other or other things. But, for example, if human capacities of sensation or sensibility are considered, they are not reducible to the clarity

[126] *Otherwise than Being*, 24.
[127] Ibid., 24.
[128] Ibid., 24.

and definiteness of an idea derived out of the said.[129] For instance sensational experiences such as being gently touched by a lover or being stabbed by someone are not simply reducible to the ideas of happiness, enjoyment, vulnerability or suffering. Sensation and perception of the *I am*, which are basic to every knowing, not only always display a fragment of the whole in every moment of perception and are never complete, but also depend upon the environment and the other.[130] It is precisely this relational structure which indicates again a "something" prior to being's essence as conceived by the *I am*.

All this leads Levinas to the conclusion that in the process of knowing we experience the passing from images and thus realize that all knowing is symbolic. In the said we experience particularity and thus fragmentation but never totality. Every "access to Being" out of knowing, consciousness, sensation – a language which already indicates a problematic exteriority as if one could look at being's essence from the outside – 'is already borrowed from thematization, consciousness of ..., the self sufficient correlation of the saying to the said.'[131] But this equation of the saying with the said, of the appearing with the appearance, signifies the re-presentation of a present in the *I think* and discloses the ontological structure of signification but not the whole reality of being. This then is a pointer *beyond* ontological signification of being because the *said* as the foundation for signification never discloses *the presence* of the present; it is always secondary. The following graph attempts to illuminate this structure.



Graph 8: Being and its Beyond

[129] Ibid., 63.
[130] See also above Weizsäcker's theory of *Gestaltkreis*.
[131] *Otherwise than Being*, 68.

Following this argument it can be contended that transcendence exhibits an important character of being. If human understanding of being includes the *otherwise and beyond* of the ontological signification of being, then its transcendent character must be acknowledged in its ontological as well as in its metaphysical meaning.

> If transcendence has meaning, it can only signify the fact that the *event of being*, the *esse*, the *essence*, passes over to what is other than being. ... Transcendence is passing over to being's *other*, otherwise than being. Not *to be otherwise*, but *otherwise than being*. And not to not-be; passing over is not here equivalent to dying. Being and not-being illuminate one another, and unfold a speculative dialectic which is determination of being. ... Being's essence dominates not-being itself.[132]

To put it in a nutshell, being is not identical with the construction of a cognitive subject, it does not derive from cognition. 'The "birth" of being in the questioning where the cognitive subject stands would thus refer to a *before the questioning*, to the anarchy of responsibility, as it were on this side of all birth.'[133] This leads back to the start: There is no *I* without a *Thou* and thus no philosophy apart from this relation. There is no philosophical question without facing the other, and the "what?" and "who?" can only be uttered because of a structure "before the questioning", which means that the possibility of response is already given before any cognitive subjectivity is possible. At this point one might also think of Wittgenstein's insight that there is no private language and that language (as being inseparably fused with experience) must be learned. His notions of *Sprachspiele* and *Lebensformen* underline the fact that language is not always capable of expressing what we experience.[134] Language, then, as a conscious act of signification, representing the said, depends on certain forms of life which are already given.[135] This given structure, which Levinas calls the *otherwise than being*, correlates with the notion of the *saying* without the said indicating the beyond modality of subjectivity. This modality of being emerges out of the-one-for-the-other structure and is found in the notion of responsibility.

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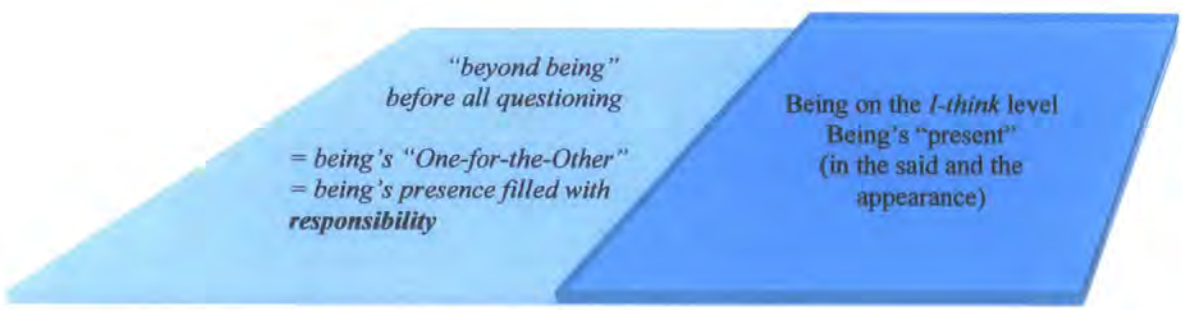
[132] Ibid., 3.
[133] Ibid., 26.
[134] See above Chapter Two, subsection 2.2.1.2.
[135] Cf. Schwöbel's account of reality as both a given (and therefore preceding all human language games) and open and accessible for human interpretation within the process of experience: Chapter Two, subsection 2.2.1.3.

3.4.3.3 Responsibility: The-One-for-the-Other

Levinas adds a new argument to his discussion by looking at the interdependence of bodily existence and human sensibility. Sensibility as a character of a living being is inseparably linked with the state of embodiment or corporeality.

> Incarnation is not a transcendental operation of a subject that is situated in the midst of the world it represents to itself; the sensible experience of the body is already and from the start incarnate. The sensible – maternity, vulnerability, apprehension – binds the node of incarnation into a plot larger than the apperception of self. In this plot I am bound to others before being tied to my body.[136]

This means that sensibility, as being tied to one's own body which in turn is already tied to another body, grounds on the structure of one-for-the-other. From conception to birth, from childhood to adulthood, a human being is from the very beginning tied to another - body to body, body to soul, and soul to soul. The world into which a child is born is already communal and it is this communion which is the ground for perceiving, learning, and living. Moreover, if from a psychological perspective subjectivity and the self mainly emerge out of separation from the other (initially the mother to which a child is tied) through a process of individuation (balancing out proximity and distance), then in this sense there is no enjoyment, no suffering, no vulnerability without the other. There is no sensibility without contact. This is why the subject cannot be described solely on the basis of the thematizing gaze and the aiming thought of the *I think*, which Levinas calls intentionality. The *always already being there* of the other precedes the I think, precedes ontology. Thus beings *one-for-the-other* signifies 'before showing itself as a said in the system of synchronism, the linguistic system.'[137]



Graph 9: Being's "One-for-the-Other" structure

[136] *Otherwise than Being*, 76.
[137] Ibid., 77.

Another aspect can be added from the perspective of time. Time passes and temporalization, time as the temporal modality of being's being-present, therefore, is always a loss of time. To be in time means to be consciously in the past. The said never coincides with the saying and is always a re-presentation of the present. The *I think* in its process of knowing never really is with itself in a way that one could speak of a having itself. The self is never for itself, it is always with the past that grows and is never the same. 'In Self-consciousness there is no longer a presence of self to self, but senescence.'[138] This senescence signifies the diachrony of time pointing to lost time that does not return and disclosing a disjunction of identity. The so much wanted *for-oneself* of identity, where the subject possesses itself, understands itself in the I think, never *is* for itself because the diachrony of time never allows the same to rejoin the same. But once there is the other, once there is a relation or sociality, *being's presence* is filled, not with the other (because the perception of the other, or the commitment for the other would already be a function of the self, a re-presentation of a present object) but with responsibility. 'The subject as *one* discernible from the other, as an entity, is a pure abstraction if it is separated from this assignation.'[139] Responsibility, the one-for-the-other structure, the possibility of response, is older than any commitment, older than any question. Responsibility *is* always there, not as a present "something" which comes and goes and thus again would represent a said, but as being's other, the infinite, which lies beyond being's essence.

> The freedom of another could never begin in my freedom, that is, abode in the same present, be contemporary, be representable to me. The responsibility for the other cannot have begun in my commitment, in my decision. The unlimited responsibility in which I find myself comes from the hither side of my freedom, from a "prior to every memory," an "ulterior to every accomplishment," from the non-present par excellence, the non-original, the anarchical, prior to or beyond essence. The responsibility for the other is the locus in which is situated the null-site of subjectivity, where the privilege of the question "Where?" no longer holds.[140]

It can now be affirmed that Levinas' notion of responsibility as an attempt to define *being's other* highlights the importance that the other is other than the I. This in turn emphasises the fact that the *I think* cannot disclose the totality of being's essence because it reduces the other to the same.[141] The *aporia* of this otherness, which in a

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[138] Ibid., 52.
[139] Ibid., 52.
[140] Ibid., 10.
[141] This is a clear distinction from Heidegger who in his notion of "man" dissolves the other in the category of "die anderen". The otherness of the other, looked upon from the perspective of the subject's *Jemeinigkeit*, is reduced to the same. Heidegger suggests that the other is not a particular other; contrariwise every other can represent the others. 'Jeder ist der Andere und Keiner er selbst. Das *Man*,

pure ontological attempt to define being's essence always leads to reductionism, can only be resolved in responsibility for the other. The other as being different precisely urges the I to respond and to answer gratuitously. The inquiry after *being*, thus, has to include more than any phenomenological description of the *I think* can provide us with, which cannot help but reduce all otherness to sameness-structures in its process of understanding. It is precisely in encountering the other's face that the I recognizes a glimpse of *being's otherwise*, a structure which goes beyond immanence. It is this *for-the-other* older than *consciousness of*, which goes beyond and thus

> precedes, in its obedience, all *grasping*, and remains prior to the intentionality of the *I*-subject in its being-in-the-world, which presents itself and gives itself a synthesized and synchronous world. The *for-the-other* arises in the *I* as a commandment understood by the *I* in its very obedience, as if obedience were its very accession to hearing the prescription, as if the *I* obeyed before having heard, as if the intrigue of alterity were woven prior to knowledge.[142]

This being's otherwise, the for-the-other of being, which is prior to all commitment, is most profoundly articulated in being's responsiveness. The "to be oneself", despite the *aporia* of sameness and otherness, can be found in responsibility as being's structure before all questioning. Responsibility, then, is the proximity of the same and the other, a one-for-the-other structure, a prior to any "being-in-the-world." In other words, '[p]roximity, difference which is non-indifference, is responsibility. It is a response without a question, the immediacy of peace that is incumbent on me.'[143] But to avoid any misconception it has to be stressed that this understanding of being's responsibility in proximity has nothing to do with an altruistic inclination that is rooted in the said of our consciousness. Rather it is this responsibleness before all responsibility which enables us to respond, to see the other as belonging to me, and to be a living being in responsibility for the freedom of the other. Thus it can paradoxically be claimed, that 'it is qua *alienus* – foreigner and other – that man is not alienated,'[144] but in the most meaningful way with himself.

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mit dem sich die Frage nach dem *Wer* des alltäglichen Daseins beantwortet, ist das *Niemand*, dem alles Dasein im Untereinandersein sich je schon ausgeliefert hat.'. The conclusion is that this "to the same reduced otherness" is an original part of the *Dasein*: '*Das Man ist ein Existential und gehört als ursprüngliches Phänomen zur positiven Verfassung des Daseins*': *Sein und Zeit*, 128-9.

[142] *Entre Nous*, 166.

[143] *Otherwise than Being*, 139.

[144] Ibid., 59.

3.5 WHAT IT IS TO BE HUMAN

In this final part I want to draw together what seem to me the most important features of the discussion. My intention is to draw converging observations together and make a final proposal towards an answer to the question of what it means to be human. For this proposal I would like to introduce the image of a "spinning coin" in order to help the reader understand the complex and relational structure of human personhood. The converging thoughts throughout this chapter lead to the following proposal which describe the basic traits of human personhood as a coin as well as the spinning of it, expressing the dynamic of human existence. While the coin refers to the findings from the matter-mind dialectic, the relational interconnectivenss of personhood's *being*, the "spinning" dimension attempts to express that human life is not static but dynamic. Life is being experienced and this experiencing includes the relation to the beyond structure of human life. "Spinning" also indicates the "being pulled outwards", expressing a beyond relation, a *more* than what the coin is able to describe. This image of the coin and its spinning aspect can function as a framework for the following discussion. What I propose to do now, therefore, is, first, to introduce and explain four characteristics of the essence of what it is to be human (the coin dimension), second, to reflect on the "spinning dimension" and thereby connect the basic characteristics with the dynamic of human life and then, third, summarize the discussion with a concise description of what it is to be human.

3.5.1 Four essential characteristics

1. Integrated Otherness. The first characteristic signifies the basic relational structure of personhood's essence. This structure is most profoundly described as the interconnectiveness and interdependence of otherness and sameness building together an indispensable unity. They form a GESTALTKREIS in which one notion cannot be conceived without the other. Thus persons are unique by virtue of their own particular perception, their own subjective development of consciousness which nobody will ever share. Simultaneously persons are only truly themselves by virtue of being connected and interwoven with the other and the environment. This basic structural characteristic I call *integrated otherness*. It simply *is* before all questioning, before all experiencing, and before all conceptualising. Human persons, so to speak, are saturated with it. In this

sense they *are integrated otherness* and will live accordingly if they acknowledge precisely this sameness-otherness structure as the basic foundation of their human essence, which cannot *be* without the particular other and the environment.

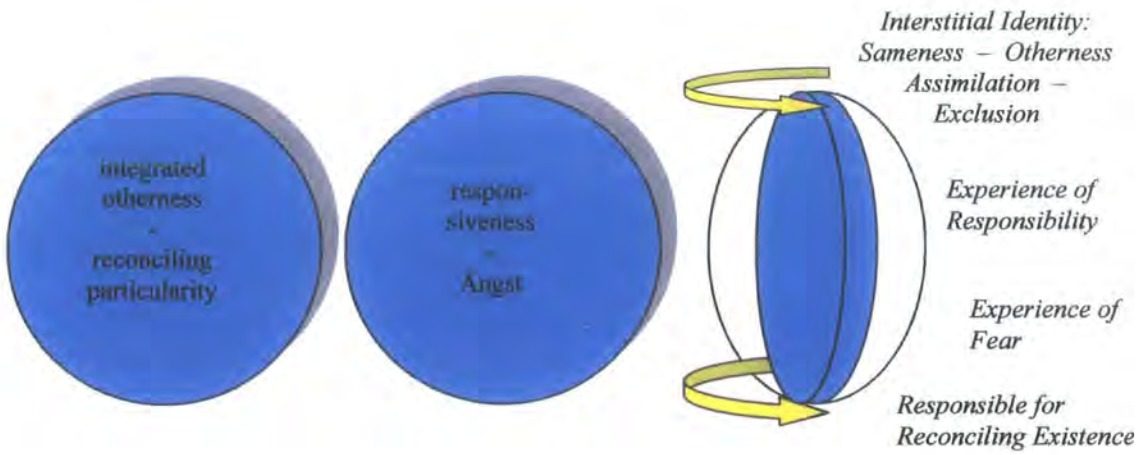
2. Reconciling Particularity. At the same time, however, human beings' *integrated otherness* reveals another creative tension, which leads to the second characteristic. One might say that my particularity and the particularity of the other clash within the structure of integrated otherness. Because personhood's being is *integrated otherness*, and hence expresses a state of crisis (Weizsäcker), it is always in need of gaining itself (*re-conciliare*) anew in order to retain its human identity. A balanced human identity, however, as being one with oneself, will most likely be found within a *reconciling* process of constantly integrating the *particularity* of the other into one's own perception of human beingness. This characteristic I call *reconciling particularity*. The term *reconciling* is used here in distinction to the term *reconciled* to underline the open character of all human being and that, despite the essential necessity of the balanced and reconciled state of existence between otherness and sameness, all found and re-gained biological and psychological balance remains open. If the particularity of the other must be respected and appreciated as being part of myself (without being reduced to the same), then this fact exhibits *being towards reconciliation* expressing human beings' in-between (sameness-otherness) place. On the "spinning coin" dimension, this points towards the importance of human communion enacted within the two poles of assimilation (reducing the other to the same) and exclusion (reducing the other to the total other and hence not letting the other being part of the same). In a nutshell, because human identity cannot be realized without the other, human being's *integrated otherness* must also be conceived as *reconciling particularity* in order to uphold a balanced human existence. Otherwise human beings deny and distort the relational structure of the human condition.

3. Responsiveness. A balanced human existence, or a reconciling process, however, will only be possible if human beings are truly and mutually responsive. This is the third characteristic. Human beings are communicating beings. As such they have the capacity for experiencing, interpreting and organizing the world that they inhabit. *Responsiveness* then signifies human beings' integrated otherness and reconciling particularity as a one-for-the-other structure (Levinas). Human community exists as a

togetherness in which one cannot but respond to the other. It portrays a mutual being-there-for-the-other. In Weizsäcker's terms I could also add that it is the notion of decision inherent in the relational one-for-the-other structure, which is imperative for every crisis (the instability and the regaining of balance within each biological act). Hence one can also say that responsiveness, in order to gain and maintain a balanced identity, means a decision for the other. A human person *is* already responsive before experiencing life. A human person *is* already turned toward the other before making a decision. On the "spinning coin" dimension this turns into responsibility for the other.

4. Angst-structure. The relational essence of personhood is always in becoming, never totally resolved. This implies personhood's openness and becoming-ness. Looking from this angle I am able to distinguish three levels of openness: a) relationality's indefiniteness in each organic act called crisis (biological level), b) the uncertainty of not-having-oneself within the consciousness-time relation (philosophical level) and c) the constitutive element of otherness within my self-system (psychological level). This structure highlights the fourth characteristic that I want to call "Angst-structure." A human person *is* Angst-structured before experiencing life. In other words, personhood's relationality is inhabited by an Angst-structure which expresses and combines the notions of identity crisis, openness or becoming and integrated otherness. The experience of fear as a conscious and concrete reality then is a consequence of this structure within the "spinning dimension" of human life. Due to this human "Angst-structure" the notion of fear becomes intelligible on many levels and includes all human aspects, be it a Kierkegaardian notion of existential fear, a Heideggerian notion of fear as a fundamental way of being-in-the-world, or a depth-psychological notion of fear as something that accompanies us from birth to death because of the various demands of life.[145] The responsiveness- and the Angst-structure, therefore, indicate a before or beyond consciousness, while responsibility and fear belong to the realm of the dynamic of human life, the conscious experience of the "spinning."

[145] For a helpful account of the notion of fear, Kirsten Huxel, 'Das Phänomen Angst. Eine Studie zur theologischen Anthropologie', *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 47 (2005), 33-57.



Graph 10: The four characteristics and the spinning dimension of the human coin

3.5.2 The spinning dimension

To elucidate the relation between the coin and its spinning dimension let me briefly refer to one of Weizsäcker's insights. Weizsäcker holds that the outcome of a decision (i.e., how we realize a particular movement) cannot be predicted; only when we execute it will we see what form it takes. This insight depended on the fact that the execution of an action is determined by perception. Human action (or movement) is always *proleptic action*; it depends on the *anticipation* of the action which in turn is a function of perception. From this it follows that our perception of personhood (i.e., of what we assume the essence of being or the nature of being human is) determines to a large degree the outcome of our actions. This underlines the dependency of human decision-making and responsibility on our anticipated conscious framework of humanness. In other words, the execution of a human act, the execution of responsibility and the subsequent outcome of a decision within human relationships and encounters, depend precisely on the proleptic perceptions (the anticipation of an encounter) of the persons involved. This means that the "spinning coin" dimension as the enactment of human life is inseparably linked with the four characteristics as the givenness of the human condition. Reconciled human existence, then, depends precisely on the perception of human beings' essence as integrated otherness and reconciling particularity.

Looking upon the subject matter from the perspective of life experience (as being consciously involved in the dynamics of life with its manifold relations and encounters), being human means to be responsible for one's own life, the lives of others and the environment. This responsibility will be carried out and pursued *humanly* if consciously grounded on the perception of personhood's relationality as displayed above. Responsibility then has to be described as the task of finding one's own identity by minimizing fear, or in other words, by looking into the other's face, responding gratuitously because we belong to each other, and thus take up mutual responsibility. In doing so, human beings aspire after surmounting the somewhat difficult and threatening experiences of otherness and the unknown future, which always remain a trigger of fear. However, as a possible consequence hoped for, the *essential* tasks of responsibility and of coming to terms with fear will lead to a concrete experience of human reconciliation when a balance between otherness and sameness is found, be it within myself, within the realm of relationships with others or within my perception of being part of the creation. Hence, one can also circumscribe responsibility as the duty of being responsible for reconciling existence.

Finally, one crucial point has to be addressed. As I have mentioned at the beginning of this part of the chapter, the spinning of the coin as an image for the dynamic of human personhood also includes the experience of being pulled outwards. So far I have described the essence of personhood as integrated otherness and reconciling particularity (correlating with the essential experiences of sameness and otherness as well as assimilation and exclusion), responsiveness (correlating with the essential experience of responsibility), and Angst-structured (correlating with the essential experience of fear). But the "spinning coin" analogy also draws attention to the notions of ultimate meaning (Frankl), the beyond or the openness of being human. These notions indicate the human experience of transcendence. Ultimate meaning as I have already noted in some parts of the discussion can only be attested from a beyond point of finite time, a beyond the matter-mind relation, a beyond being as the object of phenomenological and scientific investigation. If *reconciling particularity* can turn into a balanced state of acceptance, respect and integration, if *responsiveness* can turn into *responsibility*, if the *Angst-structure* can be overcome, and if all that can lead to a *reconciled experience* of human existence in a concrete situation, then ultimate meaning and the reality of ultimate reconciliation has to be a real possibility. This observation already points towards theology and the next two chapters in which my intention will be

to address religious experience and elaborate a relational concept of God. However, what can be said from the anthropological perspective is that the relational structure of human personhood's essence leaves space open and thus indicates a relational structure *beyond* the immanent matter-mind aporia. The "spinning human coin" *is* in its lively and dynamic being-ness pulled towards a beyond itself. This trait of being human *is* the real possibility of finding meaning and reconciliation which human beings long for. To conclude, let me now present the following concise description of what it means to be a human person.

3.5.3 Conclusion

To be a human person means *to be relational* in a way that indicates the essence of *integrated otherness* and *reconciling particularity*. To be a human person means to be *Angst-structured* and *responsive* in a *one-for-otherness* structure including the characteristics of "for-the-other" and "for-the-environment" (pointing towards an economic-ecological aspect of being). To be human means *to be in becoming* and *open towards an ultimate meaning*, which indicates the possibility for ethical decision-making not to be reduced to pure relativism. This human essence forms the ground for taking up responsibility for one's own life, the life of others and the world. This responsibility and its resulting decisions (human acts) depend on the proleptic acknowledgement precisely of this relationality as integrated otherness and reconciling particularity. The experience of fear, the level of flourishing or failing human relationships and interactions with the environment, will reveal if human beings succeed or not. Hence it can be affirmed, to be a human person means both *to be responsible for reducing fear as the foundation for reconciliation* and *to be responsible for a reconciled "social- or oikos-system" as the foundation for human existence*. With the term *oikos-system* I simply want to allude to the Greek word "oikos" (house, home or family) and signify the whole earth as being's finite home. Thereby is represented an ecological and economic system which human beings are part of. Where human being's relationality is acknowledged and appreciated reconciled existence becomes a real possibility of human life.

CHAPTER FOUR

HUMAN EXPERIENCE, THE BIBLE, AND THE TRINITY

4

HUMAN EXPERIENCE, THE BIBLE, AND THE TRINITY

4.1 INTRODUCTION: FROM TITLES TO ENCOUNTERS

Having completed an investigation of what it means to be human, it is now time to turn to religious language about God. What I intend to do in this chapter is to apply the trinitarian hermeneutics in the interstice to the realm of *biblical experience*. I will do this by treating biblical experience as human experience that wants to be open towards ultimate meaning, towards God and his presence in the world.[1] Experience that comes to speech within biblical stories wants to say something about God in relation to humanity. It is aware of and open towards the possibility of divine revelation occurring within the human condition, that is within life lived. Consequently, approaching biblical interpretation through the lens of human experience demands a shift from titles to encounters. This shift is unavoidable for at least two reasons; one is biblical in nature and the other experiential.

Firstly, the Bible tells primarily stories. Experiences of God are embedded in narratives and therefore cannot be easily captured by concepts or titles. God rather shows himself in the midst of events and personal encounters.[2] Doctrinal theologians[3] as well as biblical scholars[4] who put enormous stress on the understanding of certain terms

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[1] Cf. Chapter Two, parts 2.3 and 2.4.

[2] In the Old Testament the word *dabar* represents the reality of God in the world. The noun carries the event character of the verb and thus signifies not only a particular content but also embraces the notion of affair or event. Cf. John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, Volume One (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 31; G. Gerleman, 'dabar - Wort', in E. Jenni and C. Westermann (eds.), *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, Band 1 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1994), 433-43; Claus Westermann, *Theologie des Alten Testaments in Grundzügen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 11.

[3] Cf. Chapter One, section 1.3.5: William Hill in his *The Three-Personed God* approaches the biblical material by investigating the *concepts* of Yahweh, Father, Ruach, Son of God, and Logos. Robert Jenson in his *The Triune Identity* tries to prove that the notions of Father, Son and Holy Spirit express the proper name of God, while Walter Kasper deals quite substantially in his *The God of Jesus Christ* with the ambiguous concept of God as the almighty Father. Colin Gunton who is aware of the fact that especially Old Testament material is utterly neglected engages in his *Act and Being* in a long discussion of traditional divine attributes, failing to integrate biblical experience in a new and more creative way.

[4] Martin Karrer examines how within Christology the main driving force for elaborating an understanding of Jesus Christ were and still are to a large extent the christological titles or key words and concepts of Jesus' proclamation: *Jesus Christus im Neuen Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 13-22. For Eduard Lohse New Testament texts become a vehicle of the interpretation of the *kerygma*, a particular content and understanding of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. What follows is an approach in which certain conceptions within Jesus' proclamation, like *Kingdom of God* or *Mercy of God* form the structure to which the narratives have to contribute an answer: *Grundriß der neutestamentlichen*

such as Father, Son, Spirit, Word or Wisdom, usually examine the biblical evidence from a conceptual point of view, thereby largely neglecting the significance of narratives. Admittedly, this is one way of approaching the issue. However, it should not be the only one. Biblical experiences are embedded in narratives and should not one-sidedly be reduced to special word-contents.[5] In regard to the Gospel tradition, for instance, stories would otherwise lose their openness and transcendence as remembered religious experience in which every human being is still able to encounter Jesus as he talked and debated, shared table-fellowship and healed.[6] It is vital, therefore, to maintain the openness of stories and their underlying experiences.[7]

Secondly, experiences of God also reflect a dialectic between oneness and threeness.[8] There are, for instance, on the one hand, experiences of God in and through nature and, on the other, experiences of Jesus and of the Spirit. The first set of experiences might be identified as experiences of awe or ultimate dependence. Such experiences of divine reality are not in need of a trinitarian narrative; they are contained within the realm of oneness, of ultimate meaning as the truth of the one God in which Christians believe.[9] The second set, however, might be identified as experiences of

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Theologie (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1989), esp. §§ 1-9. Despite many differences, this seems not too far away from Bultmann's opinion that the object of an account of Jesus is not his life and personality, but only his teaching and proclamation: *Jesus* (München / Hamburg: Siebenstern Taschenbuch Verlag, 1964), 13. The consequence of such an approach is the tendency to subordinate and devalue the event-character of the narratives. For Peter Stuhlmacher the main scholarly task is to describe the *content* of New Testament *proclamation* and that he himself is doing this by historical analysis, reconstruction and systematic interpretation: *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Band 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 29. Cf. also Leonhard Goppelt, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 94-101. It is exactly at this point where the word-content of Jesus' proclamation is given such a high priority that in fact the content is detached from the event character of Jesus' acts and words.

[5] Cf. Erhard Blum: 'Wir stoßen als neuzeitliche Leser bei der Beschreibung der biblischen Literatur immer wieder an unvermeidliche Grenzen. Die Gründe liegen, so meine ich, in unseren literarischen Kategorien, die der spezifischen Rationalität dieser Traditionsliteratur offenbar nicht kommensurabel sind': Paper given at the Durham-Tübingen symposium, Durham University, 20.09.2004. See also Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1981), 77; Gerhard Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 179.

[6] J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 893.

[7] For a positive attempt to take religious experience seriously, Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003). Old Testament scholars are usually more attentive to the theological significance of stories. Goldingay underlines that the 'biblical Gospel is not a collection of timeless statements such as God is love. It is a narrative about things God has done': *Old Testament Theology*, 1:31. Gerhard von Rad's insight is still valid, namely, that retelling remains the most legitimate form of theological discourse on the Old Testament: *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Band 1 (München: Kaiser, 1957), 121, 126.

[8] This dialectic, which also implies a dialectic between concept and narrative, will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

[9] In view of the development of Israel's belief in monotheism (cf. Chapter Two, subsection 2.3.1.1) one might say that it was rather this type of experience (experiences of ultimate dependence and of enduring and unchanging divine love despite all flux and changes in the world) that led Israel to the confession in Yahweh as the one and only God. Cf. Deuteronomy 6.4.

personal encounters which are in need of the trinitarian narrative in order to be divine and redemptive experiences. Jesus' earthly experiences, for example, as they show themselves within the Gospel tradition, are embedded in a trinitarian framework. Jesus talks about his Father in heaven and about the Spirit who reveals truth to human beings. To encounter Jesus also means to be confronted with the one whom he called Father and the one to whom he referred as Spirit.[10] Moreover, within the worshipping Christian community, God's narrative description, the Trinity is the central reality.[11] Jesus' communion with the Father and the Spirit must then be presupposed not only if one attempts to expound Jesus' narrative theology but also if one intends to engage more generally with an interpretation of encounters with the biblical God.[12] Given the interstitial method, traces of divine revelation will then most likely show themselves within narrated experiences of personal encounters and thereby inform our hermeneutical spiral.[13]

In this chapter I am now primarily concerned with this second set of experiences as they come to speech within biblical narratives. My aim is to give an account of how the triune God shows himself through biblical experience insofar as this can be deduced from narratives. However, given the relational structure of the human condition and my stress on general human experience, I intend to focus on inter-human encounters as a hermeneutical path towards trinitarian God talk. This approach will allow me to use stories of human relationships and fellowship as a way of disclosing something about the nature of divine communion. Such an endeavour then is not so much concerned, for example, with John's rendering of Jesus' oneness with his Father,[14] but rather with Jesus' narrative theology that reveals something about the essence of communitarian life. Obviously, to look at the whole range of the biblical material is an impossible task within the scope of this thesis. This endeavour can only be a limited one. What I have in mind, therefore, is to propose a case study of Jacob and Jesus and to consider only two

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[10] E.g. Matthew 11.25-27; Luke 12.8-10; John 14.

[11] Cf. M. Douglas Meeks, 'The Social Trinity and Property', in M. Volf and M. Welker (eds.), *God's Life in Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 14.

[12] N.T. Wright points out that 'it is by looking at Jesus himself that we discover who God is' and 'that we should expect always to be continuing in the quest for Jesus, precisely as part of, indeed perhaps as the sharp edge of, our exploration into God himself': *The Challenge of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2001), 3.

[13] In regard to the Old Testament Goldingay concludes that direct affirmations and theological statements are subordinate to the narrative in such a way that they need the narrative to give them their meaning. Moses' theological statement in Exodus 34.6-7, for example, receives its meaning through the story in Exodus 32 and 33: *Old Testament Theology*, 1:37. Cf. Westermann, *Theologie des Alten Testaments in Grundzügen*, 21; Walther Zimmerli, *Grundriß einer alttestamentlichen Theologie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1989), 123.

[14] E.g. John 17; cf. also Matthew 11.25-27.

stories, Genesis 33.1-16 and Luke 15.11-32. Against objections that such a limitation puts the argument on a too weak foundation, it must be emphasised that revelatory significance does not depend on a comprehensive account of biblical stories. Rather it draws its strength from the trinitarian hermeneutics in the interstice.[15] Revelatory significance then does not depend on quantity but rather on a sound interpretation of particular experiences within the hermeneutical spiral. This means that it must be shown how narrated experiences reach beyond human sameness assumptions and thus are in need of the concept of revelation in order to gain theological significance. If this is the case then even one single story is able to contribute to our learning about learning and enhance our understanding of God. To draw such a conclusion, however, is only possible at the end of the process of interpretation. Hence, for the time being, this must suffice to justify a limited case study that wants to show how an investigation of two biblical stories can lead to trinitarian God-talk. Evidently, to focus on Genesis 33 and Luke 15 is deliberate, and I hope that the following discussion will persuade the reader of its reasonableness.

Before engaging in such a process of interpretation, however, one last issue must be addressed, namely, the choice of one Old and one New Testament story. This choice is about the importance of the whole of Scripture for Christian theology. Although the incarnation plays the central role within a trinitarian hermeneutics, the revelatory significance of Scripture cannot be reduced to the Jesus narratives alone. This entails for the achievement of an adequate biblical interpretation that the Old Testament has to be taken more seriously. To avoid any misunderstanding, for a Christian theologian there is in a fundamental way no escape from reading the Old Testament through the prism of already accepted beliefs derived from the significance of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Interpreting the Bible will always be an exercise in faith seeking understanding. 'Rather, what is at stake is an account of the nature of God that is inseparable from the particularity and specificity of Israel's account of human nature in relation to God.'[16] Consequently within a trinitarian hermeneutics no story is simply to be read on its own but in the context of a trinitarian faith. In reading Genesis 33 and Luke 15 together this faith is taken seriously. Against objections of anachronism I follow Walter Moberly's hermeneutical conclusions.

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[15] Cf. Chapter Two, part 2.4.

[16] R.W.L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 232. Cf. also Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, Volume 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 44.

> To read the Bible in the light of a trinitarian rule of faith ... is not a matter of imposing anachronism on the biblical text. It is not an exercise in scouring the Old Testament for covering or oblique references to Jesus or the Trinity... Rather it is to contextualize the Bible within a continuing attempt to realize that of which it speaks and so to bring a certain kind of concern to bear on the reading of the text. This concern is focused in a particular understanding of God and humanity, which is used heuristically in reciprocal interchange between text and reader.[17]

Christian theology identifies the God of the Bible with the triune God of Christian worship who, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, always has and will encounter human beings as the triune God irrespective of whether or not they are aware of it.[18] To use a psychological analogy, one might say that in the same way that every act we do and every word we utter reveals something of who we truly are, one might say that an encounter with God always reveals something about God's triune being since God cannot be but God's triune self. However, given the account of revelation as learning about learning in which the doctrine of the Trinity was developed in a long process over time, one has to be cautious about over simplistic assumptions. Truth about the triune God emerging from biblical stories will not necessarily show itself in descriptions of the Trinity as such but rather in characteristic experiences of how the triune God - as Israel's God and as God incarnate in Jesus Christ - acts, addresses and becomes involved with human beings.[19] It is thus my conviction that the understanding of biblical texts cannot be separated from appropriate contexts of faith and life as a whole.[20] This, however, does not mean that the Bible cannot be studied from other perspectives.[21]

To conclude, in what follows I propose a trinitarian reading of Genesis 33 and Luke 15 using the insights from Chapter Two and Three as tools for biblical

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[17] Ibid., 234. Cf. Tim Meadowcroft, 'Between Authorial Intent and Indeterminacy: The Incarnation as an Invitation to Human-Divine Discourse', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (2005), 199-218. He argues that the hermeneutical task involves a meaningful relationship between reader and author that incorporates both respect and response on the part of the reader.

[18] Cf. Moberly's hermeneutical framework. First, biblical interpretation becomes inseparable from the question of how people live and that it cannot be detached from basic human questions of allegiance and priorities, of spirituality and ethics. Second, since God is not a "person" or "object" accessible to scientific examination, the Bible depicts God with a host of analogies, which do not make genuine encounter with God straightforward. Third is the presupposition of "mystery", indicating something whose intrinsic depth cannot be exhausted. This opens up interpretation that moves beyond the possible position and meaning of such texts within a history of religious thought. Fourth, there is the "rule of faith" to guide readers so that they may discern the truth of God in Christ: *The Bible, Theology, and Faith*, 39-44.

[19] Cf. Arthur Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1962), 265-7.

[20] Cf. my discussion of experience, language and truth in Chapter Two.

[21] Cf. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology and Faith*, 66.

interpretation.[22] What I intend to do is to apply the interstitial method "from experience to revelation" to biblical experience as part of the hermeneutical spiral. The following discussion then is divided into three parts. While the first part (4.2) aims at a trinitarian interpretation of the Jacob-Esau narrative which culminates in Jacob's experience of God in Genesis 33, the second part (4.3) intends to expound Jesus' theology in Luke 15 and to spell out essential trinitarian trajectories. A short final part (4.4) will draw the discussion to a close and briefly summarize the main achievements of this chapter.

4.2 JACOB ENCOUNTERS ESAU

4.2.1 Why the story of Jacob matters

The story of Jacob is essential for Israel's identity as the people of God. In its canonical form it reflects Israel's understanding of its own history with God and its experiences as a nation before God. In what Jacob experienced, Israel recognized something of its own relationship with God.[23] Jacob not only becomes the ancestor of the twelve tribes of Israel but also one of the main carriers of God's promises to Israel. The stories that surround the person of Jacob, therefore, are not merely understood by Israel as stories that express experiences of the past but also that speak about how God acts in the here and now. They incorporate experiences of later generations.[24] Jacob's encounters with God and the promises given to him are remembered and retold and in that way function as an important guideline for subsequent interpretations of Israel's perception of how and who God is.[25] Israel's experiences of God and their respective interpretations are directly linked with Israel's self-perception as "Jacob's family." It matters therefore what Israel says about God's relationship with the patriarchs. What is told about Jacob

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[22] Objections from the field of biblical scholarship to pursue biblical interpretation in such a fashion as here proposed have to do with not giving enough attention to the complexity and the interrelation between the fields of historical *Wissenschaft*, theology, and Christian faith. Moberly rightly draws attention to a neglected fact. 'There is thus a nice irony in the fact that the recurrent rhetoric on the part of biblical scholars about freeing the Bible from ecclesiastical and dogmatic presuppositions, so that it can speak for itself, tends to coexist largely uncomplainingly with the preservation of that ecclesiastical and dogmatic construct, the Bible itself': *The Bible, Theology, and Faith*, 13-4. Cf. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:57-9. For a good account of the interdependency of faith, historical truth and biblical narrative, Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

[23] G. v. Rad, *Genesis*, 26.

[24] G.v. Rad, *Theologie des AT*, 1:171.

[25] Hosea 12; Ezekiel 28.25; Psalm 47.5; Isaiah 58.14; Jeremiah 30.10.

is essential for the identity of Israel and its understanding of God; hence the enduring significance of this story within the Old Testament.

Moreover, this story is extremely valuable because it has an inherent affinity with topics addressed in the previous chapter. The Jacob-Esau narrative not only deals with otherness and particularity as essential characteristics of the human condition but also reaches beyond the sameness structure of human experience and opens up space for God-talk in the final and climatic encounter between the two brothers in Genesis 33. Descriptions of an embrace and of a close and loving encounter between two persons emerge that prepare the way for God-talk. There is space for divine otherness appearing within the confinements of human experience. Finally, the significance of this story, as we will see in due course, is supported by the fact that Jesus takes up this imagery within his own narrative theology. Jacob's experience of God comes to stand beside Jesus' portrayal of his Father as someone who unconditionally embraces the other.[26] However, before this conclusion can be reached the context needs to be taken into consideration. In order to spell out where and in which way Genesis 33 might transcend human experience and say something significant about God we have to scan the background of Israel's experiences which are related to the Jacob-Esau narrative. This leads to the consideration of the fact of Israel's existence among other nations and its ambivalent relation to Edom throughout its history.[27] To look at this relationship will provide us with some guidelines for an interpretative framework.

4.2.2 Israel and Edom: The experience of a conflict

Before considering the Genesis account it is important to address the problem of ambivalent interpretations of human experience in relation to God-talk and the whole Jacob-Esau cycle. For this reason the concept of human experience and its dialectical structure of sameness and otherness must be recalled. Looking at the Jacob-Esau narrative and its wider context in the relationship between Israel and Edom one immediately becomes aware of the fact that conflicting interpretations struggle with one another. In Deuteronomy 23.8, for example, we read that Israel shall not abhor an Edomite for he is like a brother. One might ask then whether a Davidic expansionist

[26] Cf. Gordon Wenham, *Genesis*, World Biblical Commentary, Vol. 2 (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 304.
[27] At this point I simply acknowledge the fact of Old Testament scholarship that the oldest source J (Jahwist) is usually dated around 950 BCE. Hence all written accounts of past experiences are partly determined by Israel's existence among other nations. Cf. Werner H. Schmidt, *Einführung in das Alte Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 40-58.

politics that subdues Edom and makes him a servant, accompanied by the interpretation that this *de facto* position is in line with God's will, is justified.[28] Where are divine characteristics to be found, in the notions of exclusion and assimilation or rather in an act of embrace which leaves each party enough space for particularity? This is where the dialectic between sameness and otherness becomes important for my approach to biblical interpretation. With the term *sameness* I allude to the concept of experience as established in Chapter Two.[29] Sameness signifies common human experiences of human life which determine, influence and underlie human interpretations of reality and can be interpreted without the need for revelation to occur. Given revelation's embeddedness in experience, one has to be aware of the fact that biblical experiences and their respective theological interpretations are not excluded from this complex relationship and, therefore, will most likely mirror different and ambiguous interpretations of how and who God is. Thus the distinction made between sameness and otherness must receive utmost attention. If God as the divine other wants to reveal himself within the human condition, he will most likely do so by reaching beyond human structures of sameness. Although boundaries are fluid, it can be assumed, on the one hand, that sameness structures display common interpretations of reality that are created by self-experiencing subjects without the need for revelation to occur, while, on the other hand, otherness experiences rather penetrate common interpretations and therefore cannot easily be made intelligible merely by recourse to political, psychological or sociological influences.[30] In other words, otherness experiences are in need of revelation to occur; they are more open to God's reality. However, one can speak adequately of otherness only if one knows, at least to some reliable degree, what sameness means. In view of this it is important to scan the wider context of the Jacob-Esau narrative.

To begin with, it is vital to recognize that the historical condition of Israel's experiences of God and their respective interpretations is based upon Israel's existence among the nations. Due to this condition one can note that the story of the patriarchs 'is marked essentially by the problem of the existence of Israel in its land. Israel does not see itself as indigenous, but regards the land into which Abraham has migrated and in which Israel now lives, as given by God.'[31] Consequently, the relationship of the

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[28] 2 Samuel 8.11-14.
[29] Section 2.2.2.
[30] Cf. my discussion of monotheism and the doctrine of the incarnation in Chapter Two, subsections 2.3.1.1 and 2.3.1.2.
[31] Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 22.

patriarchs to the Promised Land is interestingly ambiguous. They live in it but do not possess it; they live in it but as sojourners and strangers.[32] Land is understood as a gift rather than a possession. In principle, there is always the possibility that Yahweh can take the land away again. This ambiguity already hints at some of the problems inherent in the relationship between Israel and Edom and its ancestors Jacob and Esau. The tense relationship between the two brothers reflects the relations between Israel and Edom with which it was connected by a varied, and often hostile history.[33] Israel lives beside Edom its southerly neighbour,[34] sometimes peacefully, sometimes inimically, and the answer to the question where God is in all these experiences is not an easy one. However, this historical condition of Israel among the nations and its ambiguous relationship to the Promised Land already alerts us not to confuse too easily, for example, interpretations of political and military victory with God's will. Israel as a political state quite naturally had to be concerned with questions of national security (including possible expansion into important military territory in neighbouring countries) and international diplomacy (including alliances with other nations). To interpret experiences of military victory as God's blessing, therefore, appears to be a matter of sameness. In a time where national and ethnic identity and religion formed a closely knitted unity, it was common for peoples of the ancient world to interpret their well-being and their military successes (fought in the name of their gods) as the god's blessing.[35] Looking from this perspective one can draw the conclusion that interpretations that link God-talk with human victory over another nation reside on the level of sameness rather than otherness. This means that they do not penetrate into the realm of divine otherness with revelatory significance for our understanding of God.[36] One has to be reserved when Israel delights in the destruction of Edom or when military victory and the suppression of Edom, as in the case of King David's expansion politics, are explained as willed by God.

What else then can be said about the relationship between Israel and Edom? Both nations derive their existence from their common ancestors Abraham and Isaac. Although God's blessing is bestowed on Jacob, who is renamed Israel, Edom is referred

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[32] G. v. Rad, *Theologie des AT*, 1:172. See also Preuß, *Theologie des AT*, 1:132-45.
[33] Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 26.
[34] Numbers 34.3; Joshua 15.1.
[35] Kings played a significant role in ancient religion and society as representatives and spokesmen of the gods. Cf. Werner H. Schmidt, *Alttestamentlicher Glaube in seiner Geschichte* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 210-2.
[36] Despite differences in the development of the institution of the kingdom, in retrospect Israel was aware of the fact that with its introduction it behaved like all other peoples (1 Samuel 8.5.20). Cf. Schmidt, *Alttestamentlicher Glaube in seiner Geschichte*, 212-5.

to as Israel's brother. On the one hand, there is sameness and likeness and, on the other hand, there is also otherness and strangeness. In other words, the experienced relationship between Israel and Edom is determined by the dialectic between brother and stranger, neighbour and enemy. Fear of the other and mistrust often prevail. In Numbers 20.14-21 we read that Israel under the leadership of Moses wants to pass through Edom but Edom refuses to give Israel passage through his territory. In 2 Samuel 8.13-14 it is rather the other way round. King David defeats and subdues the Edomites and they become David's servants. However, once David's reign is over, Edom strives for independence and several hostile conflicts with Israel are the consequence.[37] Political and military interests, concerns for one's own nation, freedom, and self-determination and even revenge[38] are often the driving forces behind these conflicts. Where is God's will and purpose in all this? The prophetic literature might help in this respect. Apart from King David, whose wars with Edom are not seen so much in the light of a neighbourly relationship between Jacob and Esau but rather from the perspective of David's kingdom as the fulfilment of God's promises to Israel,[39] hostile and un-brotherly encounters between the two nations are criticized as not being compatible with God's will. Prophetic words against Edom[40] emphasise that God's wrath is justified by Edom's unsocial and un-brotherly behaviour towards Israel. Pride and arrogance, revenge and bloodshed, are named as the main reasons for God's judgment upon Edom. In other words, Esau disregards his brother Jacob.

Similar critique, however, can also be found in prophetic texts that are addressed to Israel and Judah. God's wrath blazes up against his own people whenever they leave his ways, indulge in pride and arrogance, behave unsocially or spread injustice across the land.[41] Hence the main emphasis here is on the social level. Prophetic words uttered in the name of God which deal with the relationship between Edom and Israel do not doubt the rightful existence of Edom. Edom is Israel's neighbour and when criticism is raised it clearly dwells on a social level. In a nutshell, God's wrath blazes up in prophetic texts when relationships fail, when neighbours become enemies and when Edom or other nations disregard Israel's independence and its special status as God's people.

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[37] Cf. 1 Kings 11.14-22; 2 Kings 8.20-22; 14.7.
[38] Cf. Ezekiel 25.12-14.
[39] For a brief survey of David's significance for Israel's belief: Preuß, *Theologie des AT*, 1:25-7.
[40] Isaiah 34; Jeremiah 49.7-22; Ezekiel 25.12-14; Amos 1.11; Obadiah.
[41] Isaiah 9.7-10.4; Jeremiah 9.24-25; Amos 3-5.

Looking through the prism of Chapter Three, Israel's relationship with Edom reveals typical elements of the human condition: both struggle with particularity, otherness, Angst and, now and then, reconciliation.[42] On the one hand, there is a clear boundary, Israel is God's chosen one and Edom is not. This indicates particularity and otherness which can always turn, as the conflicts show, into excluding and threatening otherness leading to pride, arrogance, exclusion and war. On the other hand, however, Edom remains Israel's brother. There is sameness and likeness (through a common remembered story and the developing belief in God as creator and Lord of all nations) which can always lead to neighbourly, brotherly and hence reconciling relationships. Conflicts evidently are part of human relationships. It might be helpful here to recall Weizsäcker's notion of *crisis*. Decisions are necessary and the outcome of human relationships cannot be decided in advance; they have to be lived out. However, in Weizsäcker the notion of crisis was not used as a cause for hostile conflicts but rather as a reminder that human life always confronts us with decisions which in turn depend on our perception of human relationality and sociality. It is therefore essential to remember that to be human (in the image of God) means to be relational. Human being is directed towards integrated otherness and reconciling particularity and, although it is Angst-structured, is and remains responsive in a "for-the-other" way. Hence, human experiences and their respective theological interpretations that deviate from this framework of the human condition as it is given by God and, instead of moving towards integrated otherness, move toward descriptions of exclusive otherness must be regarded as belonging to the human Angst structure (hence as interpretations of self-experiencing subjects who determine their own perception of reality). Admittedly, to make this distinction will not always be easy and straightforward. However, as a guideline, it is indispensable.

In view of this analysis the following two implications can be drawn. First, looking through the prism of experience, interpretations of biblical experiences that remain within the struggle of threatening otherness, that do not penetrate the human Angst-structure at least to some degree and that cannot be expounded in terms of "for-the-other" responsiveness cannot be regarded as an essential part of the hermeneutical circle. Secondly, paying attention to the notion of revelation, if the triune God as Father, Son and Spirit wants to reveal himself without violating the human condition he will most likely do so by opening up space within the realm of human experience that

[42] Numbers 33.37; 34.3; Deuteronomy 23.8. Israel settles next to Edom as his neighbour which hints at a more reconciled relationship.

enables us to enhance our understanding of God in relation to human relationality and the characteristics of integrated otherness and reconciling particularity. Interpretations in line with 2 Samuel 8, where David's war against and his subsequent rule over Edom is narrated as willed by God, and texts that pull in the direction of exclusion and un-brotherly behaviour, have to be rejected. Given this framework, it can be shown that the story of Jacob's reconciliation with Esau provides us with an experience that pushes beyond the sameness structure of Israel's experienced relationship with Edom and in that way opens up space for trinitarian God-talk. Without further ado let me now turn to the Genesis account.

4.2.3 Jacob and Esau: A struggle with otherness and particularity

The story of Jacob and Esau is a story of conflict between two brothers who represent opposed and different ways of character and life-style.[43] The way in which the story is told and in which the two brothers are introduced, one as a settled shepherd and the other as a non-settled hunter – but also the ethnic notions, Jacob as the Father of Israel and Esau as the Father of the people of Edom (Genesis 25.23) – has far reaching implications. This story, as shown above, is also a story about rival peoples and ways of living, about exclusion and conflict on a national scale. It seems to be a paradigm and thus a reflection of so many human stories which constantly occur in the world up to modern times. Hence this story is of significant importance because it does not remain in the private sector but reaches beyond itself, asking whether Jacob's reconciliation with Esau should also be seen as a paradigm for national reconciliation. Looking from this perspective, the Jacob-Esau story boldly calls into question the propriety of all subsequent stories which take for granted unquestionably a relationship of conflict between Israel and Edom, thereby neglecting Esau's embrace with Jacob. To get to the centre of the story, what must be asked is the God question. Where does God appear and subsequently how can God be perceived? Who is the God of Jacob? This is a difficult question but it can be asked because, as Walter Brueggemann reminds us, '[t]here are no troubled dimensions of human interaction which are removed from the

[43] Parts of the interpretation in this section I owe to a Bible Study by Dr. Jörg Barthel, Old Testament scholar in Reutlingen / Germany.

coming of the Holy God. And there are no meetings with the Holy God apart from the realities of troubled human life.'[44]

Jacob and Esau are described as two opposed and totally different persons. One is in favour of his mother, the other of his father; one is a shepherd, the other a hunter; one is marked as decent and respectable, the other as wild and restless. One can hardly think of a bigger potential for conflict: two persons who live, speak, believe, dress, and even eat differently. They are strange to each other and it is here that one faces an essential reality of our human condition: strangeness, foreignness and unfamiliarity.[45] Then Genesis 27 narrates a story of deception. Jacob deceives Esau and is blessed by his father instead of Esau. What follows is a tragedy. Esau's joy and expectations of receiving his father's blessing are ripped apart.[46] He now has to face the bitter reality that his own brother has crushed all his hopes. Full of hate he tries to kill Jacob who manages just in time to run away. The immediate result of this plot of deception is a broken family: two alienated brothers, a bitter father, and a lonely mother.

Jacob and Esau reflect a reality where differences and particularities are seen as opposed to one another. Otherness is not interpreted in a positive way as an enrichment for human community but rather seen in a negative way as a threat to relationships where one only feels safe if one is able to subdue and subordinate the other. Jacob knew the weaknesses of Esau. He was sly and intelligent, while Esau was a little bit naïve. The scene in Genesis 25 where Esau sells his first-born-rights to Jacob over a meal of pottage is especially illuminating. 'Here things are governed by human need (Esau) and human cleverness (Jacob).'[47] One is hungry, naïve and not particularly gifted and the other one intentionally takes advantage of this situation. Esau's need and hunger, however, must not be understood as an expression of laziness, dumbness or moral inferiority. It rather indicates his particular situation and circumstances and signifies his life situation from which he cannot escape. Weizsäcker's notion of crisis, Frankl's description of human beings' striving for meaning and Levinas' account of the problems of reductionist perceptions of being without the other are all present in this story. In a nutshell, the narration leading up to Genesis 33 highlights a struggle with otherness and particularity and displays typical elements of what it means to be human.

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[44] *Genesis*, Interpretation. A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 210.

[45] This story 'is realistic about power and position in the family, about the practices of promise and deception, about wages and departures and reconciliation': Brueggeman, *Genesis*, 206.

[46] For an account of blessing in the Old Testament: Claus Westermann, *Der Segen in der Bibel und im Handeln der Kirche* (München: Kaiser, 1992), esp. 56-61.

[47] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 217.

4.2.4 Genesis 33: Towards reconciliation

All the dramatic incidents reach their climax in Genesis 33. Esau and Jacob finally find new ways of interpreting their situation and subsequently move towards reconciliation. Many years have passed since the plot of deception and Jacob himself has had to experience many ups and downs in his life. But eventually the story moves towards the unavoidable, the encounter between the two brothers. Esau was on his way to meet Jacob and this time Jacob had no chance to turn around and run away. He had to meet his brother face to face. He was anxious and frightened. He not only prepared gifts for Esau but also a speech in which he wanted to ask for forgiveness. At this stage Jacob comes to realize that he had to deal with his wrongdoings. This whole preparation appears to emerge out of feelings of guilt and of fear and trembling. Jacob dreaded to see Esau because he still believed that he would hate him and so he adopted desperate measures to win Esau over.[48] Acts of loyalty and submission determined his preparations. Esau is addressed as lord and master, while Jacob referred to himself as Esau's servant. Would he receive Esau's favour?[49] When the story moves on to narrate the actual encounter between Jacob and Esau one is taken by surprise. Jacob is confronted with a situation he could never have predicted.

> And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. ... He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. But Esau ran to meet, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.[50]

After that they introduced their families and then Jacob says:

> If I have found favour in your sight, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favour have you received me.[51]

This is an extremely important and central statement for understanding the final conclusion and the reconciliation between the two brothers. Jacob says to Esau: "For truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God!" The face of the other becomes the reflection of God's face. Jacob knew what he was talking about. Earlier in Genesis 32 when Jacob prepares himself to meet Esau, we are told about Jacob's wrestling in the night with a man. This wrestling turned out to be an encounter with God. Jacob fought,

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[48] Cf. Wenham, *Genesis*, 301.
[49] Cf. Claus Westermann, *Genesis*, Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament, Band I/2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 639.
[50] Genesis 33.1.3-4. All biblical quotations are taken from the Second Edition of the Revised Standard Version.
[51] Genesis 33.10.

he won and he lost; he was hurt and had to learn to live with this weakness. Jacob called the place "face of God" and summarized his experience: "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved."[52] This is a remarkable interpretation since the common Israelite perception was that one who sees the face of God would die.[53] Despite his weaknesses, despite him being a deceiver, he was reconciled with God.[54] This experience is directly reflected in his encounter with Esau. His brother who was a stranger and an enemy, an image and reminder of his failure and weaknesses, becomes again a part of his life. Through Esau's act Jacob is able to integrate his brother's otherness as a reflection of his own life. Therefore his life is saved; his look into Esau's face mirrors the face of God. Although the narrator does not confuse God and brother there is an overlap. 'In the holy God, there is something of the estranged brother. And in the forgiving brother, there is something of the blessing God.'[55] This is a very deep expression of what reconciliation means and shows the significance of integrating the other into one's own self-understanding and concept of life. The other, the stranger, and even the enemy become the carrier of God's face.[56] God himself appears in the other which emphasises not just the condition of relationality between particular persons as individuals but also the inter-dependency between one person and another. With regard to the political level mentioned earlier, this entails the reconciling look of Israel into the eyes of Edom. If the Jacob-Esau story is construed as a story of origin between the two nations, then it should have the power to function as a critique for subsequent international developments. Some other texts intuitively support this experience. In Numbers 33.37 and 34.3 we read that Israel settles next to Edom as his neighbour and not as his enemy, and Deuteronomy 23.8 states: "You shall not abhor an Edomite for he is your brother." Here we can detect a cluster of experiences that push beyond the human Angst-structure of political exclusion and open up space for reconciling responsiveness.[57] Especially because of the many hostile encounters between the two

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[52] Genesis 32.30.

[53] Exodus 33.20; Judges 6.22-23. Cf. G. v. Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose*, 282.

[54] 'Es besteht nämlich eine geheimnisvolle Entsprechung der Begegnung der Brüder mit der nächtlichen Begegnung Jakobs mit Gott, sowohl hinsichtlich der tödlichen Bedrohung Jakobs und seiner Angst, wie auch hinsichtlich seines Staunens über die ihm widerfahrene Huld': G.v. Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose*, 286.

[55] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 272.

[56] These experiences then might challenge the whole of our theological enterprise, as Jörg Rieger remarks, 'without encounters with the repressed human other who is different, encounters with the divine Other are unlikely': *Remember the Poor* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 229.

[57] This parallels Israel's experience expressed in Leviticus 19.33-34 ("Love the sojourner as yourself."). Israel, despite other tendencies and developments, kept this vital theological insight alive. The stranger and foreigner must be treated equally to the native. Cf. Erhard Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, Das Alte Testament Deutsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 255: 'Es ist ein Ruhmesblatt der frühjüdischen Gemeindetheologie sondergleichen, daß sich gegen alle Abgrenzungs- und Reinheits-

nations, which rather highlight the fact of the human Angst-structure, the experience of Esau's embrace with Jacob and their reconciliation as an image of looking into God's face has to be rediscovered.[58]

4.2.5 Trinitarian implications

This rather literal interpretation is not all one can say. Being placed in the interstices of the trinitarian framework, Jacob's reconciling experience with Esau and its interpretation as seeing the face of God opens up space for seeing God's triune nature. This contention I would now like to develop a little more. The whole story shows characteristic human sameness features. It is mainly fear and guilt which determine Jacob's behaviour (Genesis 32.5,7,11,20) and which become manifest in the preparation of gifts, the speech to find Esau's favour and the division of the people into two camps. Furthermore, it is important to notice that, once the reconciling embrace with Esau is over, Jacob is already suspicious again and does not know whether or not he can trust his brother (Genesis 33.8-17).[59] The Angst-structure, which was overcome for a brief moment, prevails again. What is extremely relevant here is that within this sameness structure Jacob's experience pushes beyond it for a short moment. What Jacob expected, and what happened so often between the two peoples of Israel and Edom, either to retaliate or at the very least to reorganise the relationship in terms of loyalty and submission within a master-servant framework, did not happen. Esau had every right to be angry and the best outcome Jacob could hope for was that Esau would simply accept his acts of submission. Maybe they would exchange some words, shake hands and then, having settled an old dispute, depart again and leave each other in peace. Indeed, this is what seems to have happened if one tries to understand the story from its conclusion (vv.10-14). There, all is back to sameness experiences. Jacob cannot let go of his fear

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tendenzen (vgl. Esra 10; Neh 13) die Integrationsanweisungen mit der geschichtlichen Begründung durchgehalten haben.'

[58] To support this point one could also draw attention to the story of Ruth which incorporates a Moabite woman into Israel and thereby connects in a direct genealogical way the story of a Non-Israelite with King David. Cf. Gillis Gerlemann, *Ruth - Das Hohelied*, Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1965), esp. 26. That this story was passed on and found a place in Scripture is quite suggestive considering the fact – and given the significance of King David as the anointed one of Israel – that this connection certainly revealed a black spot in David's family tree. This story also penetrates human sameness assumptions and hence conveys a strong sense of God embracing the other. See also Goldingay who focuses on Naomi and shows how her story is one of bereavement and intermarriage closely connected with the bad reputation of the Moabites: *OT Theology*, 1:601-3. Cf. Judges 10.6; Genesis 19.30-37.

[59] Cf. G.v.Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose*, 286.

and so urges Esau to accept his gifts of restitution as a sign of repentance and confession. This obviously is a human precondition for reconciliation to take place.[60] However, Esau's behaviour does not fit in with Jacob's plans. Esau is not only surprised about the gifts with which Jacob wants to ease his anger (33.8) but also rejoices in seeing Jacob, runs towards him and unconditionally hugs and kisses him. At this point it is quite telling that Gerhard von Rad who wonders about Esau's sudden change – because he wanted to kill Jacob (Genesis 27.41) – is only able to remark that the narrator leaves this riddle open.[61] Others speak of Esau's magnanimity and generosity[62] or simply assume that Esau's resentment has long been vanished.[63] All these explanations are unsatisfactory. Given the importance of the blessing in the Old Testament and hence Esau's understandable fury, Israel's history with Edom and finally certain behavioural codes necessary in order to enact reconciliation – and even granted that Esau's bad feelings towards Jacob were somehow alleviated to a certain degree – Esau's behaviour cannot reasonably be explained by recourse to human generosity which in this case rather amounts to a god-like, heroic and quite superhuman act. Interestingly Jacob himself was not able to trust Esau's generosity. Is it not precisely here where we have to talk about God's otherness breaking into human sameness experiences? There is no appropriate explanation for Esau's astonishingly loving and gratuitous behaviour merely on the grounds of what it means to be human. Esau has changed, yes, but so completely unexpectedly that there is no sameness answer to this riddle. Even Jacob, after the amazing encounter with Esau (v.4), cannot work out what it all means. In other words, once the embrace is over, the Angst-structure is back. What is expressed in Jacob's words reaches beyond his own understanding. The encounter between brothers, and not merely Esau as an individual human other, becomes the vehicle of divine revelation.[64] Complete and unconditioned forgiveness, an embrace by the other, and a loving look into each other's face, lasting only for a few moments, become experiences of a most intense divine encounter. Referring back to Viktor Frankl, one could interpret this encounter as an experience of the inseparable unity of

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[60] Westermann in his interpretation remains completely within the constraints of this sameness structure and therefore is not able to realize what I call "divine otherness breaking into the human condition": Westermann, *Genesis*, 639-46.

[61] *Das erste Buch Mose*, 286.

[62] Westermann, *Genesis*, 646.

[63] E.A. Speiser, *Genesis*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 260.

[64] This is even more surprising because it also reaches beyond the more known experiences of divine encounters which manifest themselves in visions (Isaiah 6) or encounters with the angel of the Lord (Judges 6).

meaning, responsibility and transcendence.[65] Jacob, looking for meaning in his life, is faced by the ultimate meaning (*Übersinn*) in an event of gratuitous response. Additionally, looking through the prism of the doctrine of *imago dei*, it is obviously not the face as a part of the human body which would signify Esau as having the image (or the face) of God. It is rather the reconciling encounter between the two brothers which becomes an illustration and a realisation of divine communion.[66] Within the experience of normal ways of greeting relatives – running, embracing, falling on the neck, weeping[67] – however now under most unusual circumstances, God appears. God makes himself known within an experience that is not only in need of a narrative but also of a plurality of persons. There is no running and embracing without the other; there is no friendly look and no forgiving encounter without the other. Jacob utters "God" and sees himself in the arms of Esau. Jacob experiences unexpected forgiveness, in contrast to restitution as a precondition for reconciliation to take place, and looks into Esau's eyes and they weep together. Jacob says "face of God" and they fall around each other's necks. At this point one realizes that God-talk needs person-talk. Jacob's and Israel's belief in the one God manifests itself in a personal encounter. The belief in the one God needs the narrative to become meaningful for human life. This story, then, on a theological level is not about Esau's super-human generosity and how he was able to change so drastically but about God penetrating the human sameness structure to show himself. Jacob's words "for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God" allow us to see the triune God in and through this experience of a personal encounter. The God of Jacob reveals himself through an experience of persons in communion.

Using the language of the trinitarian framework proposed here, it can be said that the triune God, accommodating himself in the Spirit to the human thought framework, uses the human condition of two estranged brothers who succeed despite all odds and objections of human sameness explanations in achieving a reconciling embrace to reveal godself in this situation, reflecting unconditioned forgiveness and divine love. A portrayal of divine persons running towards and embracing one another and treating one another as relatives, that is to say as equal persons who long for each other, emerges as a meaningful and possible description of divine communion. One might also talk of a circle of love, persons in communion who enact unconditioned forgiveness which transcends the human Angst-structure and its inherent need for

[65] Cf. Chapter Three, subsection 3.4.1.3.
[66] For an account of the doctrine of *imago dei* and its significance, Chapter Five, part 5.4.
[67] Cf. Wenham, *Genesis*, 298.

restitution and compensation. The story of Genesis 33 renders accessible the possibility of God's social identity as a truthful description of divine love and so to speak meaningfully of a communion of divine persons who look into each other's faces and embrace each other.

4.3 THE STORY OF THE PRODIGAL SON

4.3.1 From Jacob to Jesus

Before considering an interpretation of Jesus' narrative theology, I want to recall the fact that taking the incarnation seriously means that God was completely exposed to the human condition. This entails that Jesus' experiences were dependent on the conditions of human experience and therefore have to be understood as embedded in the particularities and thought frameworks of his time. Additionally, since the stories we find in the Gospel tradition are stories about the *remembered* Jesus, the problem becomes even more complex. Hence, interpreting Jesus' narrative theology is not a straightforward matter and too simplistic conclusions have to be avoided. However, if revelation takes place without God violating the human condition, then, although dependent upon a particular time in history, the remembered stories about Jesus do not lose their primary significance. They reflect common experiences of Jesus' disciples who participated in Jesus' own experiences.[68] When I turn to Luke 15.11-32 as an example of Jesus' narrative theology,[69] the procedure of working my way through the story is similar to the one in the previous part. Again, in order to say where Jesus' experiences reveal something about God's triune life, we have to be attentive to the dialectic between sameness and otherness.

To find a suitable starting point for this endeavour we have to look at the conclusion of the previous part. Hence, we are confronted with the primary notion of an embrace as a possible metaphor for Trinity talk. If I want to advance the argument responsibly, it is indispensable to connect this image with memories of the remembered Jesus that seem to oppose it. All human images remain ambiguous and have to be

[68] Cf. Chapter Two, section 2.3.3. See also Stuhlmacher: 'Jesus' person, his behaviour and his word have to be perceived as God's embodiment. Jesus was not merely a God sent eschatological prophet but he also testified the reign of God as God's parable in person': *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 1:74. [My translation.] Cf. Hurtado in respect to John's Gospel: 'In GJohn Jesus not only is associated with the glory of God, he *is* the glory of God *manifest*': *Lord Jesus Christ*, 380.

[69] For an account of the significance of Jesus' parables, Hahn, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 1:63-9.

carefully circumscribed if we want to employ them meaningfully for Trinity talk. It must therefore be conceded that the image of an embrace also evokes two closely correlated experiences: exclusion and assimilation. People, for example, who are not included in an embrace might feel excluded and isolated from others, while people who are embraced too tight might be frightened to lose their own particularity and self-identity. Jacob's experience did not help us in that respect. Hence I hope to discover some advancing insights from Luke's remembered Jesus. To begin with, I now would like to offer some reflections on the notion of exclusion within Jesus' own ministry.

4.3.2 Jesus and the language of exclusion

Luke's Gospel puts an enormous stress on Jesus' love and care for the poor, the sick, the sinner and the outcast. Jesus, so to speak, is remembered as someone who embraces people who need help and long for healing and meaning in their lives.[70] Two passages of the Lukan *Sondergut* may function as a brief illustration. The first narrates an event where Jesus encounters the Pharisee Simon and the woman who was known as a sinner (Luke 7.36-50). In this encounter Jesus opens up possibilities for change and healing. Facing both and speaking to both he offers new perspectives in order to break down harmful and excluding boundaries.[71] The second passage reports how Jesus shares life with a tax collector in the most profound way, eating and drinking and being his guest (Luke 19.1-10).[72] Zacchaeus experiences a transformation through Jesus' proximity and love. Romano Guardini, surveying the whole of the Gospel tradition, pointedly summarizes this "embracing" side of Jesus' ministry.

> Jesus' power of healing is so inexhaustible that he addresses the human needs which press near. He does not turn away; the wounds, the crippled limbs, the distorted people, all the pain does not frighten him. He stands firm. ... The word: "come to me all of you" – cf. Matt 11:28 – he does it, even before he utters it.[73]

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[70] In many stories Jesus heals, helps and teaches so that people may live and have access to life (cf. Luke 4.16-21). He liberates people from their isolated ivory towers, opens up their eyes to widen their perspectives, and frees them from evil and separating bonds that they may live. Cf. Udo Schnelle, *The Human Condition: Anthropology in the Teachings of Jesus, Paul, and John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 17-8; Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 277.

[71] For an exegetical discussion, Heinz Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium*, Herder Theologischer Kommentar (Freiburg: Herder, 1984), 1:429-43. Cf. Anton Steiner and Volker Weymann who stress Jesus' embracing attitude: *Bibelarbeit in der Gemeinde. Jesus Begegnungen* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag, 1987), 46-7.

[72] For Hahn Jesus' meals and his table fellowship with different people (disciples, sinners, teachers of the law) belong to one of the core pieces of Jesus ministry, enacting his proclamation of the coming kingdom of God: *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 1:62-3.

[73] *Der Herr. Über Leben und Person Jesu Christi* (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 52. [My translation.]

However, although this emphasis is paramount, it does not represent the whole picture. Some parts of Luke's Gospel confront us with words of rejection and exclusion. There exists a puzzling dialectic in Jesus' proclamation between all-embracing and all-loving statements, on the one hand, and rather harsh, rejecting and excluding words, on the other. There is a certain kind of togetherness of embrace and what looks like exclusion. In Luke 6.24-26, for instance, Jesus speaks harsh words against the rich, while in 6.27-38 he expounds in depth what it means to love one's enemy and how to embrace one's neighbour. Then there are challenging words on the topic of "following Jesus" which seem to be a matter of "in" or "out" (Luke 9.23-27.57-62). Either one follows Jesus wholeheartedly or else one is excluded from his company. In the former case it seems that one is embraced by Jesus, while in the latter it is rather the opposite. Finally, to give a penetrating example, in Luke 11and 12 Jesus utters severe words against the Pharisees that lead to the following poignant statement:

> And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but he who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. And every one who speaks a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven (Luke 12.8-10).

This statement clearly shows that Jesus is also remembered as someone who used the language of exclusion. In this particular case this is important to note because Jesus construes this passage in a trinitarian way: confessing him as the Son of man before God the Father goes hand in hand with confessing the Holy Spirit. The passage then might also be interpreted as a warning not to blaspheme against experiences of the triune God. Hence the question might be asked whether or not this remembered speech of Jesus in which he alludes to his divine communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit ultimately hints at a communion that excludes others.[74] Disappointingly, biblical commentators seem to circumnavigate the problem and take the edge off it. Eduard Schweizer's interpretation, for instance, is determined by the topic of discipleship without fear. The passage is merely a warning not to deny Jesus and to confess him boldly without fear before the world.[75] Similar is Walter Grundmann's explanation where he expounds these words under the heading of "Call to confident and confessing

[74] This question is also important in view of Moltmann's trinitarian account of friendship in opposition to lordship that appears to be void of any kind of exclusion. Cf. Chapter One, section 1.2.1.

[75] *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, Das Neue Testament Deutsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 133-5.

faith."[76] Although both state that these words reflect a serious warning against possible ruin and depravity in view of the final judgement, no discussion takes place of the inherent problem of the meaningfulness of the language of exclusion in the midst of insider talk (i.e., an experience of embrace).[77] Where is the triune God in all this and what does this rhetoric entail for God-talk? Where are Jesus' experiences determined by human sameness structures and where might they well penetrate into divine reality? It is therefore essential to offer some brief reflections on this issue. One way forward would be to follow the strategy of the previous part. Human sameness structures which influenced Jesus' earthly experiences and therefore do not easily lend themselves for revealing divine otherness could then be outlined in a first step.[78] What seems to be more helpful here, however, is to link the above dilemma directly with the basic condition of human relationality and thereby clarify the boundary territory for Jesus' theological language.

On this ground it can be argued that if the above passage amounted to a statement of total exclusion in opposition to a total embrace (assimilation) it would also rob the concept of embrace of its meaning. Experiences of both exclusion and embrace make sense only within the human condition if relationality is presupposed. An embrace can only take place if there are others to embrace without my particularity being dissolved into nothingness and exclusion can only be experienced as isolation if others abandon me, however, without vanishing altogether. Within the human condition the parts and the whole need each other; there is no being without the other. In other words, there are always relations. Life is only possible as a *Gestaltkreis*. A notion of total exclusion without the other still being there is nonsense because it violates the essence of life. Consequently it is not meaningful to imagine a state of exclusion which is void of God. The same, obviously, must be said with respect to the notion of assimilation as the other side of the coin. Total assimilation as the counterpart of total exclusion where particularity vanishes altogether is not meaningful. Hence the image of an embrace as a loving encounter always entails some traces of exclusion (experiences of otherness - of being oneself) and assimilation (experiences of sameness - of losing oneself) as its two

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[76] *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1971), 251-5.

[77] In Luke's context these words are addressed to the followers of Jesus (Luke 12.4). Thus people who are "in" suddenly hear words of total exclusion.

[78] Dualistic ideologies, frameworks of master and slave or simply experiences of isolation and despair could be mentioned. They all convey the unavoidable experience of being excluded. Jesus then might have had no other choice but simply to use these patterns as examples. However, the question posed above where Jesus' proclamation might say something about divine reality, still would not be answered.

boundary poles. Consequently, the words of Jesus, if they want to remain meaningful for human experience, find their limit precisely at this boundary of human relationality.

If this is taken into consideration, a guiding principle appears, namely, that Jesus' words and acts must be interpreted *within* the dialectic between exclusion and assimilation. This perspective opens up the possibility to understand both Jesus' loving and excluding words as an attempt to clarify the meaning of the language of embrace as an image of God's triune life.[79] One focus of Jesus' ministry is to enact and describe divine love. But in order to do this within the human condition, Jesus needs to say what it is that brings us closer to this love (reflecting the divine embrace to a higher degree) and what leads us away from it (distorting the embrace). The notion of love itself carries with it a radical sense of exclusion. Insofar as divine love signifies all that which enables and sustains meaningful life as it is meant by God, everything that contradicts that love cannot be called love and hence must be excluded from any meaningful image of a loving embrace.[80] This points to a crucial *aporia* that ultimately cannot be solved but rather makes one aware of the fact that theology always falls short of grasping God. We might call this, to borrow a phrase from Weizsäcker, an experience of ANTILOGISCH EXISTENCE.[81] Love as something distinctive can only be so if it is not dissolved into sameness. This means that there must be something of which it can be said that it is opposed to love. From this perspective it can be argued that Jesus' words sometimes press hard against the outer boundaries of meaningful language because life, as it is given to us by a loving God, is at stake. Jesus' words of exclusion express the fact that when people exclude each other in a way that they ignore the other's dignity and live at the expense of others, they *de facto* violate God's love. Where human life neglects its own precondition, namely its essence of integrated otherness and reconciling particularity, it amounts to destroying human sociality in the image of the triune God. When this happens life indeed turns into hell and experiences of exclusion prevail. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus' wrath is justified by the Pharisees' or other people's unsocial behaviour towards their fellow people. Pride and arrogance, usury and greed, exclusion of neighbours and hypocritical judgement are named as reasons for Jesus' exclusive language.[82] Where human beings ground their behaviour in systems of fear, in thought

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[79] Hence one might say in regard to the human condition that 'bearing God's image is not just a fact, it is a vocation': Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 141.

[80] 1 John 4.16.18: "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him... There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."

[81] Cf. Chapter Three, subsection 3.4.2.6.

[82] E.g. Luke 11.37-54; 12.13-21; 16.14-18.19-31.

frameworks of threatening otherness or in ideologies of "in" and "out", denying each other access to the table of life, they exclude themselves from the love of God.

Finally, Jesus' speech in Luke 12 about people who deny God's presence in the Son of man and in the Spirit, then, might refer to human beings who cut themselves off from their exocentric being and disregard their openness towards an ultimate meaning.[83] From a theological perspective, such denial amounts to abandoning the possibility of revelation occurring within the human condition altogether. God would be the total other leaving creation in complete isolation. This, obviously, mirrors an ultimate crisis because it contradicts the very essence of Jesus' ministry as the Son of God. Where people choose to go down this road, Jesus has need for the language of exclusion in order to say something meaningful about divine love at all. Talk about a divine loving embrace, consequently, might then entail the language of exclusion, however, without turning the language of exclusion itself into divine attributes.

To summarize, it can be concluded that Luke's emphasis on the embracing side of Jesus' ministry is not contradicted by Jesus' language of exclusion. Experiences of embracing love, to be distinctive and to remain meaningful for human life, are in need of the language of exclusion in order to specify the characteristics of love, however, without becoming itself the focus of attention. The confession in God as love, the insight that human being is directed towards integrated otherness and reconciling particularity and Jacob's experience of God oblige us to assume that traces of revelatory significance within Jesus' own narrative theology are most likely to be found where the language of a loving embrace is deepened as an image of divine communion. Hence it will also be useful to look at the story in Luke 15.11-32 through the lens of the Jacob-Esau narrative. This will allow me ultimately to see better where Jesus' descriptions are in agreement with my interpretation of Genesis 33 and where they reach beyond.

4.3.3 Luke 15: The father's embrace

To begin with, let me briefly mention some similarities between Jesus' story and Genesis 33. Jesus tells his story as a response to the Pharisees' protest that he has table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners. Hence the story deals with the themes of exclusion and embrace, with the struggle for identity, and with the question of how God interacts with human beings who are embedded in a social reality that is, on the one

[83] Luke 12.49-53 and 13.22-30. Cf. Chapter Three, section 3.4.1.

hand, in need of rules and regulations but is, on the other hand, also more than that. This is also a theme which we have already encountered in the relationship between Esau and Jacob, Israel and Edom. Moreover, Jesus narrates the relationship between three persons, a father and his two sons and their respective problems with one another. Again, one immediately becomes aware of the parallels with Genesis 33, be it the distorted relationship between Esau and Jacob or their struggle with particularity and otherness.

The story in Luke 15.11-32[84] begins with a rather unacceptable breach of right behaviour by the younger son's audacious demand for his share of property and his decision to depart and leave the family. With this step the younger son breaks with the ethos of ancient household solidarity.[85] But not only that, the younger son also excludes himself from the social relationships which gave him shelter and home. Moreover, if we consider that the characters in the story are identified by relational designations – father, son, brother – then 'the very identity of each character is unthinkable without the others. The son's breach with the family was total... His project was to un-son himself.'[86] From this perspective it becomes intelligible why the father later in the story calls him lost and dead.

But how does the father react? The amazing point here is that the father lets the son go. He pays him out and gives him permission to leave. However, in connection with the son's project to un-son himself, the father acts most tellingly in a different manner. The father 'who lets the son depart *does not let go of the relationship between them*. The eyes that searched for and finally caught sight of the son in "the distance" (v.20) tell of a heart that was with the son in "the distant country" (v.13).'[87] This is important to underline because the father never "un-fathers" himself; he never becomes a non-father although the son in his own reflections on his past, when he is about to come home, thinks of himself as a "son no longer worthy to be called a son" (vv. 19, 21). He would rather cancel his family ties and be treated as a "non-son." But the father remains also the father of the "son who thinks he is a non-son," because he would not

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[84] The following interpretation is indebted to Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 156-65. For a more traditional interpretation in its biblical context: Eta Linnemann, *Gleichnisse Jesu* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 79-87.

[85] Cf. Schweizer, *Evangelium nach Lukas*, 164; Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 157. For a different view: Gerd Petzke, *Das Sondergut des Evangeliums nach Lukas*, Zürcher Werkkommentare zur Bibel (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1990), 138-9.

[86] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 158. Wright comments: 'For the younger son to ask for his share of the inheritance is almost unthinkable: it is the functional equivalent of saying to his father, "I wish you were dead."': *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 129.

[87] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 159.

let the "lost" and "dead" son out of his heart's embrace. Consequently when the lost son comes home the father runs towards him and embraces him. For the father, to be father without his sons is unthinkable. Volf summarizes pointedly:

> Without the father's having kept the son in his heart, the father would not have put his arms around the prodigal. No confession was necessary for the embrace to take place for the simple reason that the relationship did not rest on moral performance and therefore could not be destroyed by immoral acts. The son's return from "the distant country" and the father's refusal to let the son out of his heart sufficed.[88]

The confession of wrongdoing surely plays a crucial part in the story but the order envisaged by the son – first "confession" and second "non-son relationship" – is not just simply turned around but transcended by an unconditional act of embrace. For the celebration to begin the son's confession was not abandoned but it followed the acceptance. The father surpasses the thoughts of the younger son whose expectations were governed by a strict logic of rules which mark the boundaries between good and bad, faithfulness and disloyalty.[89] If you have failed you are "out" and if you have dishonoured your family then there is no way back. The younger son's reflection, "treat me as one of your hired servants" (v.19), highlights the fact that this was indeed his logic and the only way to go about things because returning home as a son amounted to disgracing the whole family in the eyes of everybody.[90]

Interestingly, it is this logic of clear-cut exclusion or assimilation that connect the younger and the older brother. For all their differences, in this respect they are very much alike. The older brother, unlike the father, did not keep the younger brother in his heart. Hence he "un-brothers" himself and when the father welcomes back the younger son he also "un-sons" himself. He comments on his fury about the father's behaviour with the words "when this son of yours came back" (v.30) implying that as long as the father and the younger son have a father-son relationship he has to exclude himself. Just as the younger son's project, the older son's is in a similar way to "un-brother" and subsequently to "un-son" himself. He is enraged because basic rules have been broken, rules by which one is either "in" or "out". Would not most people side with the older brother when possessory and inheritable rights are at stake? We might want to forgive the younger son, but would we also put a ring on his finger and exercise an act of reinstatement and restitution? The father, however, never denying that the younger son has done wrong and that the older brother has every right to be upset, not only reaches

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[88] Ibid., 159.
[89] Cf. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, 313.
[90] Cf. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 129.

beyond the older son's logic of rule adherence but also beyond our modern sensitivities and interpretations of justice. Life is more complex and ambiguous than the older brother wants to admit. From the very outline of the story it becomes obvious that the identity of each person is unthinkable without the others. Despite all wrongdoings *relationships between persons* cannot be annihilated by moral misbehaviour. This is why the father at the end of the story wholeheartedly embraces the older son by saying, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours" (v.31). One cannot live and construct rules and also his own identity in isolation. What the father is trying to tell his older son is that before 'any rules can apply, he *is* a father to his sons and his sons *are* brothers to one another.'[91] The father's secret so to speak is his loving embrace which keeps both sons in his heart never terminating the relationship.[92] The father represents someone who refuses to construct his own identity in separation from his sons. This entails the consequence that the sons themselves, although they would have liked to, ultimately cannot construct their identities without the father and the other brother. Un-brothering, un-fathering, and un-soning are no way out any more. To confess one's wrongdoings and to repent certainly are vital ingredients for a process of reconciliation. However, exclusion as a form of drawing "in-out" borderlines and as an attempt to annihilate indissoluble relationships is no option. The father's embrace makes it impossible to "un-relation" relationships.

> Relationship is prior to moral rules; moral performance may do something to the relationship, but relationship is not grounded in moral performance. Hence the will to embrace is independent of the quality of behaviour, though at the same time "repentance," "confession," and the "consequences of one's actions" all have their own proper place.[93]

4.3.4 Trinitarian trajectories

Looking through the lens of Chapter Three and the Jacob-Esau narrative we have again observed typical elements of the human condition: struggles with otherness, particularity, Angst-structure and reconciliation. Both sons' behaviour represent sameness experiences which we already found in Jacob. From the angle of the social sciences, one could call this framework the dialectic between honour and shame. Honour 'belongs to the male to defend both corporate honor (i.e., family, clan or

[91] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 164.
[92] Cf. Schweizer, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, 166.
[93] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 164.

village) and any female honor embedded in the corporate honor... When a male loses his honor, he experiences negative shame.'[94] From the perspective of the two sons, this framework fuels the conflict between the father and his sons and between the two sons. The younger son, ridden with guilt and having lost his honour, approaches the father in a similar way than Jacob approached Esau. He knew on the grounds of what he had done that he had to come back as a servant. This was expected by the older son whose anger is understandable and one could simply say correct because his younger brother fitted this category of a "shameless" person who does not acknowledge the rules of human interaction and social boundaries.[95] What I called above "un-soning" and "un-brothering", then, are the consequences of experiences of shame and honour. They are also manifestations of the human Angst-structure enacted through decisions that lead to the exclusion of the other. The "other" brother who left the common ground of social rules was perceived as a threat to the community. Assimilation was expected and submission to the common sameness framework. Where Jesus' narration pushes beyond these sameness assumptions of his time is precisely in the description of the father's behaviour. What the two sons expected, and what had happened so often between the two peoples of Israel and Edom, between ethnic groups within the Roman Empire and within human relationships in general, either to retaliate or to organise relationships in terms of loyalty and submission within a framework of honour and shame, did not happen. The father acted completely unexpected. Most striking is the fact that the father not only embraces his younger but also his older son. Moreover, he assures both, although the younger son un-soned himself and the older brother un-brothered himself, that he actually never un-fathered himself. In connection with Genesis 33 this leads to four crucial implications.

First, while Jacob's reconciling experience presupposes a mutual broken relationship, because both Jacob and Esau un-brothered themselves, Jesus' father never un-fathered himself. Hence in Jesus' story, there is a shift from temporary to lasting embrace. While Jacob's experience of God in the event of a personal embrace seemed to last only for a short moment, Jesus' father embraces both sons, organises a feast and assures them of their lasting relationship.[96] Secondly, while in Genesis 33 Jacob's Angst-structure takes over, in Luke 15 it is the father's love. The father attempts to

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[94] Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey, 'Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World', in Jerome Neyrey (ed.), *The Social World of Luke-Acts* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 43.
[95] Ibid., 45.
[96] Cf. Petzke, *Das Sondergut des Evangeliums nach Lukas*, 140.

show his sons that relationships come first and that sameness structures, where they lead to exclusion that distorts relationships, must be overcome. The seriousness of this implication is stressed in two ways, first, by the father's statement that the younger son was dead and lost but now is alive again and, secondly, by the older son's refusal to come to the feast. What Jacob's experience left open, namely the significance of a lasting embrace and its implication in regard of exclusive otherness, is now taken up by Jesus. Thirdly, Jesus' stress on the father not un-fathering himself emphasises the need for language of "persons in relations." In these words there is such a strong sense and confidence of unbroken relationship which transcends any simple explanation. Love, as was said earlier, is so fragile within human sameness structures especially when connected with experiences of guilt, honour and shame. According to human frameworks, the father would have still acted lovingly if he had un-fathered himself in this process, then forgiven and finally welcomed his son into the family. What else can we expect of human relationships? However, Jesus assures his listeners of the father's enduring and unbroken relationship with his sons.

This leads to the last and final implication. While Jacob's experience was still limited by an event between two brothers, Jesus' story takes on board the third party. Saying this, I deliberately allude to Levinas' account of being.[97] Theologically, the point here then is not the story on the literal level. It is not about a father and his two sons as an image of the Trinity and it is not about maleness or anything like it. It is rather the significance of the third party. The notion of "for-the-other" becomes truly meaningful within the realm of human experience if there is also "another" other. If there were only two there would be no real decision. Jesus' Father-talk becomes meaningfully in ways of three persons who interact with one another. Relationships and hence embraces have to be worked out and balanced within a circle of persons. Only when the third party enters the scene can one adequately talk of responsibility because decisions have to be made and the notion of a communion is taken seriously. Giving one's attention to one particular person leads simultaneously to a letting go of another. In view of this it is vital to notice that the two brothers only communicate with the father but not with the other brother. Hence their behaviour displays an exercise of diminished relationality that excludes the third party. While the younger son is not concerned at all with the question of how his behaviour might have affected his brother's life and reputation, the older son deliberately cuts himself off from his brother. In contrast, the father communicates with

[97] Cf. Chapter Three, subsection 3.4.3.3.

both and reassures them of his unbroken relationship with both. The father's embrace of the younger son does not lead to the exclusion of the older. Both are a part of his embrace. At this point divinity shines through. Jesus' theology pushes beyond human sameness assumptions.

With this story Jesus tells us that his Father is always in relation and never un-fathers himself; hence he maintains a real unbroken communion throughout. Through this notion Jesus' closeness with his Father through the Spirit manifests itself.[98] In Frankl's terms one might call this an experience of ultimate meaning. Jesus relates to the divine reality and hints at what Levinas called the beyond structure of being, the one-for-the-other dimension, which *is* before any questioning. The trinitarian significance of this story then lies in Jesus' social theology of the father's behaviour as a reflection of what it means to be God as Trinity. Jesus' understanding of divine love evolves around a story which hinges on four notions: lasting embrace, unbroken relationship, relationships come first, and the significance of the third party. From this it follows that the relationship between the three divine persons is unbroken; there is no un-fathering, no un-soning and no un-spiriting. This understanding of communion is opposed to exclusion that disregards the relational structure of life, not because moral wrongdoings do not matter, but because relationships come first. This embrace is lasting and expresses mutual love. It portrays both the particularity of each divine person, hence includes the notion of otherness, and the complete togetherness and mutual integration of one another.

In terms of a human story this embrace can be characterised as a caring for the other, taking the other seriously, respecting the other, wanting to be with the other and being there for the other without letting go of the relationship between them. In view of Jacob's experience, we might add the portrayal of persons running towards and embracing one another and treating one another as relatives, that is to say as equal persons who long for each other. If this is equally valid for the Son and the Spirit then this mutual love and communion can be described as a oneness of integrated otherness and reconciled particularity as the ground of being. This amounts to visualising the Trinity as a circle of persons in love, persons in communion who enact unconditioned

[98] See also the wider background of the Gospel tradition where Jesus is remembered as having an intimate relationship with God whom he called Father: Matthew 6.9; 11.25-30; Luke 10.21-22; 11.2; Mark 12.1-12; 14.36. Cf. Gerald O'Collins, *The Tripersonal God*, 42-6; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 724. In view of the Holy Spirit one might also point to Acts (1.8; 2; 8.26-40; 10) where Luke narrates the impact of continuing experiences of the Spirit which vindicate the convictions about Jesus' redemptive death and resurrection for all humankind. But one might also include John 14-16 where the Spirit is portrayed as the advocate, spokesman, and agent of Jesus. Cf. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 396-402.

forgiveness. This implies that there is no Angst-structure, no alienation, no assimilation and no exclusion in God. Divine responsibility includes the third party. As the ground of being, the Trinity displays a communion which reflects a perfected one-for-the-other relationship.

Evidently, the last few descriptions do not apply to human relationships. Human embraces do not last, relationships are broken, people un-relation themselves and they neglect the importance of the third party. Hence Trinity talk is always accompanied by incomprehensibility. To visualize the Trinity as a loving embrace of persons who interact in the most perfect way is and remains a narrative of divine mystery. For human experience such perfection is impossible, it simply transcends the human condition. However, if this is kept in mind and if Trinity talk is always related to talk about the human condition in order to never lose sight of its limits, then the language proposed here is a meaningful contribution to theology: firstly, it describes meaningfully the ground of being and the horizon of our hope in familiar terms precisely as something that transcends the human condition and, secondly, it enables us to employ this language as a guiding framework for the exercise of human relationships. For human life as a reflection of divine trinitarian life, then, the task must be to work out the best possible embraces that steer their way through the pitfalls of exclusion and assimilation as it was set out in Chapter Three. This task leads beyond this chapter and will be taken up in the final part of the next chapter.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter attempted to give prominence to the interwovenness of human experience, the Bible, and the Trinity. If biblical stories are viewed through the lens of human experience and if they are approached with an interstitial attitude that moves from experience to revelation they open up space for Trinity talk. Placing myself in the interstices, I have tried to show how the different levels of human experience are connected with and nurture one another. The dialectical structure then can be maintained that biblical experience informs the Trinity and that belief in the Trinity informs the interpretation of biblical experience. This resulted in saying, firstly, that Israel's monotheistic belief in the one God of Jacob opened up towards God-talk in terms of persons-in-relation and, secondly, that Jesus' narrative theology built on this God-talk, extended it and received its most unique interpretation precisely within a

trinitarian framework. Moreover, the language of exclusion was elucidated in a meaningful way as signifying that which contradicts and denies the divine embrace between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as the source of all being. Acknowledging this, Jacob's experience of God and Jesus' talk about his Father pushed beyond the sameness structures of the human condition.[99] God showed God's triune self in an experience of a personal embrace and in an event of a lasting and unbroken communion. In respect to both stories we observed that certain experiences of God are in need of the narrative in order to express how and who God is and that such narratives not only involve talk about persons in communion but also that within this communion-talk relationships come first. From a theological starting point, this fact finds its ultimate cause in the Trinity itself. Looking through the prism of human experience, this circumstance is anchored in the human condition as it is given to us by God manifesting itself in experiences of the Spirit and of Jesus.[100]

Finally, being clear about the fact that Trinity talk utterly depends on human experience, the limits of theological discourse and therefore God's incomprehensibility always remain in sight. Space must be left open for divine and human otherness. While the human image of a loving embrace cannot completely get rid of the language of exclusion, the divine embrace utterly transcends this condition. Belief in the one God does not allow for exclusion as it is experienced within the human condition. Although we can say that God's otherness appears within human sameness structures, this does not mean that we get hold of God's otherness. Language remains metaphorical. Theology, so to speak, is a joint venture between both experience and revelation and between oneness and threeness. The notion of the mystery of God, which must be maintained within theological discourse, then can be seen precisely in this dialectic, namely, that belief in one God is in need of belief in the Trinity as a divine communion and that the reverse is also true. With these last remarks, however, I have already overstepped the limits of this chapter and opened the door to the next.

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[99] Cf. Moberly's hermeneutical remark that the use of mystery 'should open up interpretation that moves beyond the possible position and meaning of such texts within a history of religious thought': *The Bible, Theology, and Faith*, 42.

[100] 'Jede Theologie ist auf „positive Religion" angewiesen, und sei es, um sie zu negieren. Theologie ist immer auf Geschichte angewiesen': Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 311.

CHAPTER FIVE

AN INTERSTITIAL TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

5

AN INTERSTITIAL TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION: DISCOURSE AS CREATIVE TENSION

The previous chapter ended on a dialectical note. It was argued that belief in one God is in need of belief in the Trinity as a divine communion. This contention underlines the primary conviction of this chapter, namely, that theological discourse should be exercised as creative tension. In Chapter Two I argued that theology should be done from an open "in-between" place where the problem of identifying the relationship between experience and revelation is not yet solved. Such a methodology is not linear but rather spiral, it learns while it is on the road, integrating new insights, revisiting old ones, and correlating one with the other. Walking on this road, stopping at many different signposts of human life and examining various notions of God-talk, we have enhanced our understanding and the depth of revelation and human experience. Being placed in the interstice then means not only to relate the different levels of experience with one another but also to hold in tension the notions of the One and the Three. It is now time to draw the threads together and turn again more specifically to the field of systematic theology.

In this final chapter I am now confronted with the task of finalising my account of an interstitial trinitarian theology. This endeavour demands what I want to call *discourse as creative tension.*[1] If trinitarian theology wants to keep the balance between the One and the Three and between the concept and the narrative it has to keep these poles in creative tension without dissolving the one into the other. Hence my intention is not, as is so common in contemporary trinitarian theology, to develop an integrative account in which one perspective is swallowed up by the other. What I rather attempt to do is to sustain this tension. Only then will one be able to relate creatively God-talk and talk about the human condition in a way that both inform each other on the common ground of human experience and thereby expand our understanding of the relationship between the Trinity and human life. In order to do this, it is vital to refine methodology. It is essential at this point to take up once again the question of hermeneutics and

[1] This is a corollary of Chapter Two, part 2.4.

include findings from the previous two chapters to work out in more detail how things hang together within trinitarian discourse as an exercise in maintaining creative tension. This will lead to a more fully developed interstitial theology. Once this is done, I will be able to draw on the conclusions from Chapter Three and Four and offer a final proposal of the Trinity and human life, both informing each other.

The chapter is divided into four parts. In part one (5.2) I intend to revisit the old problem of the One and the Three with its inherent reductionisms. This analysis will help me to strengthen the case for interstitiality in accordance with insights from human experience. Building on Viktor von Weizsäcker's contribution in part two (5.3), my aim is to offer a finalized account of a trinitarian *Gestaltkreis hermeneutics*. This account will then be linked in the third part (5.4) with some reflections on the role of the doctrine of *imago dei* in order to clarify the relationship between the Trinity and human life, thereby giving the whole argument more weight. After having completed this task I will turn to the last part of this chapter (5.5) and propose an account of the Trinity in relation to human life. This part will summarize and conclude the argument of this work.

5.2 THE ONE AND THE THREE: A MISLEADING DICHOTOMY

I cannot think of the One
without immediately being surrounded by the radiance of the Three;
nor can I discern the Three
without at once being carried back to the One.

GREGORY NAZIANZEN (Oratio 40.41)

In his article 'Radical Monotheism and the Trinity' Christoph Schwöbel concludes that contemporary theology should reflect on the two-fold thesis: 'Only a radically monotheistic theology can be a proper trinitarian theology, and only a proper trinitarian theology can be a radically monotheistic theology.'[2] This statement sounds similar to the one quoted above from Gregory Nazianzen which tries to keep the balance between the One and the Three. However, there seems to be a difference. How does Schwöbel conceive of the relation between the One and the Three? Phrases like "relational trinitarian monotheism" and "the trinitarian structure of Christian monotheism"[3] rather seem to imply a certain kind of logical priority of the oneness of God's nature over against the threeness of trinitarian personhood. This exhibits an attempt to elaborate a

[2] *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 43 (2001), 74.
[3] Ibid., 70.74.

unifying and universal concept in which the distinct Christian experience of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is ultimately swallowed up by an account of *structural relationality* as a principle of the one God. This suspicion is strengthened if one becomes aware of the fact that Schwöbel draws heavily on Gunton's concept of "transcendentals", which ultimately dissolves the notion of *one ousia* into the notion of divine communion.[4] His analogy rests on the divine persons who are, in their trinitarian context, constituted by their relations. In Gunton divine particularity and personhood gain priority as a means of developing a new conception of the notion of substance based on the idea of relationality.[5] Hence, I would like to take up some problems from Chapter One and shed fresh light on them from the insights gained in Chapter Two and Three. My claim will be that unless we abandon any logical priority between the notions of *ousia* and *hypostasis* and treat them as equal poles of theological inquiry into the doctrine of God we will always end up violating human experience. This seems to be part of the problem that arises between so-called proponents of social doctrines of the Trinity and others who favour a strict monotheistic starting point for their enterprise. Those trinitarian theologians who attempt to reconcile both sides (for instance Gunton or Schwöbel) still prioritise, although in a more subtle way, one notion over the other. To begin with let me turn once more to the concept of relationality.

Relationality has been and still is one of the key concepts in contemporary trinitarian theology. It is used to emphasise the notion of *hypostasis* or *person* within the doctrine of God and to express God's being as a being-in-communion. However, as I have tried to show in the first chapter, this shift towards relationality turned out to be a replacement of one one-sided emphasis with another. Accusing many theologians of giving the notion of *substance* priority over the notion of *person*, contemporary trinitarian theologians who are in favour of some kind of social doctrine of the triune God give clear priority to the notion of three divine *persons* over against the one *substance*. Because revelation history has to be the point of departure for any reflection on God, they argue, God as he has revealed himself in the economy as Father, Son, and Spirit is what he really is in himself, namely and first of all a threeness of persons. Although this argument bears much validity, if taken too straightforwardly it neglects the consequence that any substance-talk that is *derived* from a threeness of persons must

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[4] Gunton argues that the 'substance of God, "God", has no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion' *(Promise*, 9) and that the 'three do not merely coinhere, but dynamically constitute one another's being', they exist in 'reciprocal eternal relatedness' (*The One*, 164). For more details, see Chapter One, section 1.2.3.

[5] See Gunton, *The One*, 180-209.

necessarily lead to a *unifying principle* of the Three rather than an affirmation of the one God.[6] A unifying principle has to be distinguished from the talk of one divine substance. But to avoid any misunderstanding, in saying this it should also be remembered that the same problem accompanies opponents of the social doctrine of the Trinity who favour a theistic approach in the name of divine oneness and simplicity. For any talk about the Trinity which is solely derived from the oneness of the divine being necessarily leads to the conclusion that the doctrine is nothing more than a helpful grammatical device.[7] Both sides then rest on a misleading dichotomy, respectively presupposing their own starting point as prior to the other.

This problem indicates a major weakness within trinitarian theology, namely, the one-sided employment of the concept of relationality. Reference to relationality tends to be essential only in regard of the three divine persons but not with respect to the divine ousia and as a theological hermeneutics regarding the relation between the oneness and threeness of God. The theological question, which arises out of this consideration, is whether a trinitarian theology that emphasises the notion of being-in-communion must necessarily lead to the suppression of the notion of *ousia*. To clarify the matter let me briefly refer to Colin Gunton's theology. In Chapter One I have identified an ambiguous and misleading argumentation.[8] Gunton contends that because the three divine persons are what they are not due to a common substance but due to their mutual indwelling, in other words their perichoretic communion, they are what they are *only* by virtue of an eternal relatedness. Substance, therefore, does not indicate another underlying principle of deity but rather is constituted by three persons in communion. Because Gunton does not want to stress the singularity of each of the divine persons (and receive the same tritheism-critique as Moltmann) he has to lift the concept of relationality onto an ontological level over against the concept of substance. This shift leads him to the sublation of substance-talk by relationality-talk with the result that the notions of oneness and substance are derived from the perspective of the particular as constituted

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[6] Cf. Chapter One, section 1.2.2 on Moltmann.

[7] Nicholas Lash in his *Believing Three Ways in One God* (London: SCM Press, 2002) is a good example. He is convinced that – in following Augustine – 'the distinction between "substance" and "person" in Latin terminology is "purely and simply one of linguistic convention"' (p. 31). And he concludes: 'we have relationships, God is the relationships that he has ... God, we might say, is relationship without remainder, which we, most certainly, are not' (p.32). However, it should not be forgotten that due to the trinitarian distinctions of Father, Son, and Spirit in the event of revelation, characterizing divine reality, it is rather the unity of the divine substance which is hidden than the other way round. Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:340-1.

[8] Cf. Chapter One, section 1.2.4.

by the whole. Gunton anchors the reality of substance in the particular.[9] His argument goes something like this. Since the particular gains its distinctiveness only through being placed within the whole it is the whole which constitutes the particular. Common to all particulars is that which makes the particular a distinct and unique particular, namely, the relations. In virtue of this, the single particular cannot have priority, because otherwise in respect to God-talk this would inevitably lead to tritheism. But since Gunton is reluctant to uphold the notion of *ousia* in a dialectic structure with the notion of *three hypostaseis*, he is forced to anchor the notion of God's oneness in the universal notion of relatedness. Each person is therefore constituted by relationality and hence eternal relatedness becomes the substance of God. What Gunton is effectively doing here is reducing the concept of substance to the concept of communion instead of keeping both concepts in a balanced dialectic. Although Gunton in his concern for practical and social implications in linking the doctrine of God with the human condition never loses sight of the particular person as an individual, the universal marks of being, the abstract and general notions of perichoresis and relatedness, receive priority in a way that begs the question of who or what does the relating. Such an approach lends itself easily to social-political projectionism, a criticism that is often charged against proponents of social doctrines of the Trinity.[10] Indeed one may rightly wonder how the general notions of perichoresis, indwelling, or relatedness do suddenly entail the implications of favouring certain social concepts or structures over against others. Richard Fermer in his critical reflections on Gunton's work and his use of the Greek Fathers confirms this suspicion, arguing that it is important to notice that the Greek Fathers do not equate *ousia* with *koinonia*. Fermer asks the question if it was not rather the balance between the two concepts with which they were concerned in order to safeguard God's being as three and one?[11] In a similar way John Meyer has persuasively

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[9] See especially his discussion of substantiality and the particular: *The One*, 188-204.

[10] Karen Kilby, 'Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity' *New Blackfriars* 81 (2000), 432-45, criticises the proponents of social doctrines of the Trinity especially for being projectionist in *both* directions: 'Projection, then, is particularly problematic in at least some social theories of the Trinity because what is projected onto God is immediately reflected back onto the world, and this reverse projection is said to be what is in fact *important* about the doctrine' (p. 442). This is certainly true of Jung Young Lee in his *The Trinity in Asian perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996). Although Kilby highlights some reasonable critique, her overall argument is not persuasive. Kilby seems in the end to 'renounce the very idea that the point of the doctrine is to give insight into God' (p. 443). This statement leaves one wondering whether God's self-revelation in history in Jesus Christ and through the Spirit does say anything at all about God. Kilby prefers to prioritise *ousia* over against *hypostasis* and hence compromises divine particularity in Jesus of Nazareth.

[11] 'The Limits of Trinitarian Theology as a Methodological Paradigm', *NZSTh* 41 (1999), 158-86. Cf. J. Lienhard, '*Ousia* and *Hypostasis*: The Cappadocian Settlement and the Theology of "One *Hypostasis*"', in S. Davis, et. al. (eds.), *The Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 99-121.

argued in a discussion of Athanasian theology and the problem of the notion of *monarchia* that 'many of the difficulties we experience in reconciling Eastern and Western depictions of the Trinity stem from a misleading oversimplification of each tradition's presentation, *especially the idea that one must assign logical priority to either the divine substance or the divine persons.*'[12]

The problem of many contemporary trinitarian accounts is that the notion of relationality is somehow misconstrued as an overall ontological principle.[13] In my own account I have tried to show that the modern turn to relationality only correctly functions as a device against reductionism in our understanding of the universe and the human condition and should not be understood as a superior concept with universal status over against the dialectical and sometimes paradoxical experiences of human life. I argued in Chapter Three that clear distinctions between assumed opposites or orders of priority such as substance and relation, body and mind, subject and object become less evident when proper attention is given to the human condition and are seen in a new light that acknowledges an indispensable interdependency which does not permit a subordination of one to the other. Within the universe particles remain single entities while at the same time they depend on their relations. Within the human sphere persons always remain single entities despite their dependence on relations. Although it can be said that a human person becomes more distinctly herself through being placed in a specific part of space at a certain time in history as well as through her lived relations, the concept of a person cannot solely be reduced to these relations. An embodied person

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[12] 'God's Trinitarian Substance in Athanasian Theology', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59 (2006), 96. [My Italics.] Meyer opposes Richard Cross' view who argues that the divine substance is a numerically singular item and the metaphysical place where all three persons overlap and as such posterior to the persons themselves: 'On Generic and Derivation Views of God's Trinitarian Substance', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003), 464-80. A similar problem exists when theologians try to argue against social doctrines of the Trinity: Kilby, 'Aquinas, the Trinity and the Limits of Understanding', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 (2005), 414-27. In following Aquinas Kilby obviously prioritises the doctrine of divine simplicity which allows her to view the notion of relation only from the perspective of the one undividable divine substance. No wonder that she reaches the conclusion that the doctrine of the Trinity may have some important grammatical implications for theology 'whether or not it carries any insight. If in fact the doctrine of the Trinity is simply beyond our grasp, then it may be better, more helpful for theology to display this quite clearly, than to skirt the issue, to bluff its way along' (p.423). This boldness is rather puzzling because her whole argument grounds on the assumption that we have a grasp and reasonable comprehension of God's oneness and simplicity. But why should that be? Her logic is not any different than the one employed by trinitarian theologians who argue the other way round, namely that theology knows by revelation and the Christian tradition that God is first of all Father, Son, and Spirit, and that it is rather the concepts of simplicity and oneness which are beyond our grasp.

[13] See especially concepts of the Trinity which use relationality as an ontological category and speak of God as relationality: Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993); Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1994); David Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

nevertheless is also a single, and thus unique matter-mind-stuff, entity, which is also able to influence and constitute the relations and without which there would be no relations at all.[14] The concept of substance cannot be dissolved into the concept of relations but the reverse is also true. Relations are in need of parts. If this balance is lost we have nowhere to go.[15]

Gunton attempts to overcome this problem by claiming that 'a satisfactory conception of human particularity depends upon an acceptance of the fact that persons also are constituted in their particularity both by their being created such by God and by the network of human and cosmic relatedness in which they find their being.'[16] However, he goes on to say that it is the pattern of relations which constitutes a person and what the person distinctively is.[17] This poses the question of how a person is at all capable of finding her own identity. If there are only relations which constitute my particularity as a person then I can think of only two possibilities to find and live my uniqueness as a person-in-relation. Either there is only one single, concrete and pre-chosen place or there are no fixed places at all. In the former case I would have to look for a single and concrete place in time and history, i.e., a fixed setting, where my particular place is and always will be in order to live my life according to my created personality. In the latter case I would have to accept an open and rather arbitrary process because, since I am always in relations and find myself always constituted by relations, my place in the here and now always is what I am. However, if relatedness tells all persons what they are and where they find their true identity and meaning in life, who or what is that relatedness? This example on the level of human personhood shows that if the necessity of singularity which cannot be reduced to relations is neglected, we end up with a situation where we actually can go nowhere because ultimately there is nobody to tell us where to go. On this level it can be seen that any analogy with the Trinity must

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[14] This is something that Moltmann has clearly seen. 'Man kann nicht sagen: Person *ist* Relation; die Relation konstituiert die Person... Person und Relation müssen deshalb im Wechselverhältnis verstanden werden. Es gibt hier keine Personen ohne Relationen, aber auch keine Relationen ohne Personen': *Trinität*, 189.

[15] A case in point is Cunningham's book *These Three Are One*. Cunningham suggests that we should view the Trinity as relations without remainder (cf. Lash, *Believing Three Ways in God.*). Hence, the notion of the subject tends to vanish completely and the notion of particularity gains its meaning solely as a derivation from the concepts of polyphony and participation. But how shall I give *myself* to the other and *par*ticipate in the other if there is no unique *part*, a unique *I*? Implications, which Cunningham draws on the ethical level, are therefore rather general leaving the individual Christian wondering what it actually is that he or she can do since it is the polyphonic community that determines their behaviour.

[16] *The One*, 202.

[17] Ibid., 203.

fail precisely because God could not even reveal himself if he is regarded as pure relationality.[18]

In a nutshell, the concept of relationality must not evoke a new kind of universal, which immediately becomes a new form of reductionism, but rather must remind us to keep the balance between the concepts of *ousia* and *hypostasis* (and *koinonia*). This dialectic on the ground of human experience cannot be dissolved in a coherent superior view but rather has to steer our theological enterprise and hermeneutics within a balanced dialogue.[19] Considering the debates over the doctrine of the Trinity one wonders if this was and is properly kept in mind. Theologians accuse each other either of modalism or tritheism, confusing different levels of discourse by disregarding the main characteristics of the human condition. Human experience and language depend on both otherness and sameness and are in need of concept and narrative alike. If these insights bear any truth then there is for theological reflection no such thing as a unified systematic concept in respect of the doctrine of God.[20] There is no secure place to start from either a clear cut concept of oneness, divine substance and simplicity or from threeness, personhood and communion. Discourse about the essence of divine being cannot be reduced to a concept of immaterial substance and discourse about divine personhood cannot be reduced to a concept of a single subject or autonomous individual. A narrative cannot be reduced to a concept and concepts long for narrative

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[18] Paul Fiddes in his *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000) attempts to steer his way through these problems by invoking the notion of participation. Although I admire his laudable project I think his attempt fails partly precisely because of the above-mentioned problems. Fiddes also grounds his approach in giving priority to the notion of being. Consider for example the following statement. 'The notion of "subsistent relations", properly understood, is at a third level of meaning. It proposes that relations in God are as real and "beingful" as anything which is created or uncreated, and that their ground of existence is in themselves. If we use the term *hypostasis* as the early theologians did for a "distinct reality" which has being, then the relations *are* hypostases' (p.34). Hence he deviates from Moltmann and Volf, abandons the possibility of visualising the three divine persons as subjects who have relations, and suggests speaking of "movements of relationship" (p.37). Consequently one starts to wonder how the understanding of "divine persons as relationship" informs his talk about images of domination and about Fatherhood which does not oppress.

[19] Cf. Gregory of Nyssa's careful approach. 'The notion of uncreatedness and incomprehensibility applies in exactly the same way to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. No one of them is either more or less incomprehensible or uncreated than either of the others. Now in the case of the Trinity it is essential to keep the distinctions free from all confusion with the help of the particularizing characteristics. So in deciding what is particular to each, we shall leave out of account everything which the three are observed to have in common, such as being uncreated and being beyond comprehension. We shall look only for those things which allow us clearly and without confusion to distinguish our conception of each of the three individually from our conception of the three considered together': 'On the difference between ousia and hypostasis', in M. Wiles and M. Santer (eds.), *Documents in Early Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 33.

[20] Hence it is not surprising that John O'Donnell, after a long discussion of both Ogden's and Moltmann's systematic theology, suggests two elements that are important for a Christian solution to the problem of suffering in relation to the God-question: narration and praxis: *Trinity and Temporality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 200-3.

expression.[21] Logical priority is no way out.[22] Should we not rather fully endorse both the *one ousia* (which always implies modalism in regard of God's trinitarian self-revelation in history) and the *three hypostaseis* (which always implies tritheism in regard of the Christian belief in the one God) as the two focal points of our theological reflections on God? In order to make sense of an understanding of God at all, a God who is both immanent and transcendent, should we not see them as two friends who walk hand in hand rather than two enemies who, assigning logical priority to either the divine substance or the divine persons, try to oppress each other?

If my arguments bear any validity then we are confronted with a dialectical structure. In Chapter Two I have already employed an interstitial methodology in order to maintain a constructive balance and interaction between the concepts of revelation and experience. If God reveals himself in Jesus through the Spirit as he really is, then there exists real particularity and hence a personal threeness in God which signifies more than merely a conceptual or grammatical device. From this perspective it must be said that if God exposes himself to the human condition in the incarnation in a meaningful way, then, to speak of God cannot but be personal in a rather tritheistic sense. If one wants to make sense of Jesus' life, death and resurrection as divine incarnation as well as Jesus' sense of communion with the Father and the Spirit as expressed in the New Testament, then, I think, one cannot easily dismiss Moltmann's proposal of social trinitarianism. God then exists as a communion; he truly is a being-in-communion. Encounters with Jesus as a human person and encounters with the Holy Spirit as God who actively lifts us up, sustains our lives, and fills us with hope and meaning can only be rendered intelligible in a personal and trinitarian way. Such theological discourse is in need of the narrative, of divine persons who interact with one another, who relate and shape a divine community that, although always transcending human analogies, nevertheless signifies a meaningfulness which is reflected in human

[21] Michel Rene Barnes, trying to overcome common misreadings of Augustine, makes an interesting point when he proposes that 'Augustine's theology of the Trinity is centred on divine unity conceived in terms of the inseparable activity of the Three (...), the epistemic character of the Incarnation as the decisive revelation of the Trinity, and the role of faith in leading forward our reflection of the Trinity': 'Rereading Augustine's Theology of the Trinity', in S. Davis, et. al. (eds.), *The Trinity*, 175. A rather different approach is taken by Bruno Forte in his *Trinität als Geschichte. Der lebendige Gott – Gott der Lebende* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1989). He narrates the Trinity as story. However, this leads to the same problem from the other side that, if one leaves out the conceptual side, one starts to wonder how we can still speak of the one God as Trinity in relation to humanity.

[22] For further examples of such confusion, Brian Leftow, 'Anti Social Trinitarianism', in S. Davis, et. al. (eds.), *The Trinity*, 203-49; Paul Louis Metzger, 'The migration of monism and the matrix of trinitarian mediation', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (2005), 302-18.

experiences of communion.[23] An understanding of what it is to be human as relational opens up space for such trinitarian God-talk because it reaches beyond reductionist accounts of subjectivity, individuality or individual substance.[24]

On the other hand, if we want to maintain the distinction between immanence and transcendence and the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, then God, although embracing what is not creation, is and remains other. God utterly transcends our condition. God's freedom and otherness remains an important part of the doctrine of God. To believe in God as immanent and transcendent cannot be made intelligible without a notion of the one *ousia*. It is here, as I have tried to argue above, where all the communitarian analogies collapse if the notion of God's substance is reduced to communion.[25] If relationality as the one substance, rather than a distinct and irreducible concept of ousia, is assumed to be the divine unifying principle of the three persons, one is still left with the question of *how* and *who* this God really *is* because abstract concepts like perichoresis and relatedness do not say very much in connection with a fragile and complex human condition.[26] For human persons relations are always vulnerable precisely because the human self cannot be dissolved into pure relatedness. Hence we are in need of the notion of divine ousia and consequently of some descriptions of marks of God's essence which help us to picture our createdness in God's image and which steer us to structure our relations in a more fruitful way. An interstitial theology is needed that moves beyond seeing these two poles as enemies.[27] Hence the significance of Gregory's poetic words for any theological hermeneutics which is concerned with the doctrine of God: *I cannot think of the One without immediately being surrounded by the radiance of the Three; nor can I discern the Three without at once being carried back to the One*. Both sides form a constitutive part of human

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[23] Arthur Wainwright's conclusion should be remembered, namely that the problem of the Trinity arose 'because of the development of Christian experience, worship, and thought. It was rooted in experience, for men were conscious of the power of the Spirit and the presence and Lordship of the risen Christ': *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1962), 266.

[24] Cf. F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 162.

[25] Giesbert Greshake rightly concludes that both modalism (or subordinationism) and tritheism root in a notion of totalitarian oneness or unity. 'Kurz: weil Einheit und Vielfalt im tritheistischen wie auch im modalistischen und subordinatianistischen Verständnis nicht miteinander vermittelt sind, kommt es zu einem ständigen, sich gegenseitig zerstörenden Oszillieren zwischen zwei sich gegenseitig ausschließenden Polen': *Der dreieinige Gott. Eine trinitarische Theologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1997), 459.

[26] Cf. Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 82: 'Ignoring appropriate differences among levels in the theological cosmos by modeling human relations directly on trinitarian ones, theologians tend either to downplay the difference between social relations and trinitarian ones, or lose a realistic sense of human relationships.' However, I do not see how her own account, building on a theological concept of "gift-giving" without engaging with the human condition, overcomes the problem she criticises.

[27] Cf. Thomas Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 18-9.

experience and language resonating and reflecting the relational structure of body and mind, which I explored in Chapter Three. The problem for any discourse is that neither of them can be dissolved into the other, both are capable of expressing truth, and any attempt at construing logical priority of one aspect over the other will necessarily lead to a reductionist system.[28]

This insight seems to be appreciated by some of the Fathers who clearly differentiated between *ousia* and *hypostasis* without prioritising one notion over the other.[29] As Meyer argues: 'The *homoousios* formula of Nicaea guarantees the divinity of the Son, and it also relocates the principle of unity in God from the Father to the triune co-inherence of the divine persons.'[30] Essence talk, therefore, cannot be dissolved into talk about the communion of the three persons and vice versa. Rather one has to say that the 'perichoretic mutual love of the Father, Son and Spirit is not identical to God's essence or being but is a manifestation of his unity.'[31] In virtue of this Torrance summarizes: 'Athanasius had such a strong view of the complete identity, equality and unity of the three divine Persons within the Godhead, that he declined to advance a view of the Monarchy in which the oneness of God was defined by reference to the Father alone or to the Person of the Father.'[32] This view supports the insights mentioned above about the nature of relationality and the dialectic between the whole and the particular. Both sides form a constitutive part of human experience and must, therefore, also be kept in balance when theologians engage in an investigation of the doctrine of God.

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[28] God simply is not one or three in human terms. As Nicholas Lash reminds us, 'God is not a member of a species, an individual with a nature': *Believing Three Ways in One God*, 24. And God is not three in the strict sense of three individuals. Hence 'we do not presuppose any precise knowledge of "what" God is in his One Being", or "how" he is Three in One and One in Three': Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives*, 19. Cf. Greshake who remarks that the notion of oneness and unity is a necessary idea of the human Spirit without which human beings could not correspond and be in agreement with themselves and the world. However, this must not overshadow the other fact that human life and experience is divers und plural. The One and the Many cannot be prioritised over against each other: *Der dreieinige Gott*, 443-53.

[29] Gregory Nazianzen's orations on the Son and the Holy Spirit might well be described as an interstitial theology oscillating between the One and the Three and between the concept and the narratives. Cf. esp. Oration 31.14, in F. Norris et.al., *Faith gives fullness to reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

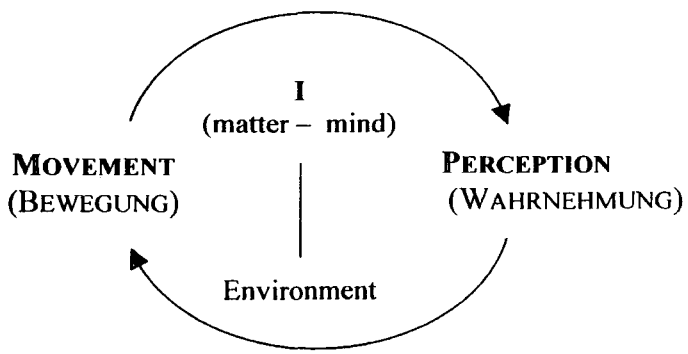
[30] 'God's Trinitarian Substance in Athanasian Theology', *SJT* 59 (2006), 89. Meyer also argues that Athanasius kept a clear balance between the *one ousia* and the *three hypostaseis*. Cf. also Augustine's *The Trinity*. Given his starting point in Book I.7 (the Three and the One) he explores both experience as it comes to speech in the manifold stories of scripture and human life and experience expressing itself in conceptual, linguistic and logical reflections. However, a word of caution might also be helpful at this point. Although I am in favour of Meyer's interpretation of Athanasian theology, one has to bear in mind that any interpretation of the Church Fathers remains ambivalent and is usually driven by one's own conviction in order to support a particular argument. Hence any straightforward connection between ancient and modern thought frameworks and concepts must be treated with caution.

[31] Ibid., 93.

[32] *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 183. See also Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives*, 18.

5.3 TRINITARIAN GESTALTKREIS HERMENEUTICS

Taking the conditions of human experience seriously, the task for a trinitarian theology is to keep the balance between the notions of *one ousia* and *three hypostaseis*. To pursue this aim I now intend to employ Viktor von Weizsäcker's highly suggestive notion of GESTALTKREIS, which is most helpful in elaborating a hermeneutic device for keeping this balance and which I will use to integrate fully in due course my conclusions from the previous two chapters.[33] Weizsäcker's concern within the context of medical anthropology was to describe the biological act as an inseparable interconnectedness between movement and perception, body and mind.[34] Both are so interwoven with one another and depend upon each other that the biological act only makes sense if both aspects are seen simultaneously and kept in a continuous relation. Moreover, although every human being stands opposite its environment, it is also part of it and only due to an encounter between the I and its environment is perception and movement realized. In virtue of this the notion of GESTALTKREIS defines the unity of the subject with its environment, which it creates constantly by moving and perceiving.



Graph 11: Weizsäcker's Gestaltkreis

Weizsäcker wanted to highlight that the relation between matter and mind, movement and perception, I and environment *is not* strictly causal and deterministic. The relationship between body and soul or between two subjects must not be seen as a connection between two separate entities. It rather illuminates the character of ***mutual***

[33] This is the case because Weizsäcker does not elaborate a new metaphysics but simply follows the path that opens up before him by experiencing and investigating the human condition.
[34] Cf. Chapter Three, subsection 3.4.3.5.

representation and substitution. Within the realm of medical anthropology body and soul cannot simply be presupposed as two basic substances. Body and soul are not a tight unity but they rather inseparably live with, deal with, and encounter one another. This then points to a *mutual hiddenness or concealment* between body and soul within our scientific processes. If one focuses on the somatic dimension the psychological dimension slides into the background and is hidden from the methods of physiological investigation and vice versa. In this sense there is a certain kind of methodological indeterminism, which, for Weizsäcker, is not the abandonment of scientific research and explanation but highlights the importance for the *human* sciences to take seriously the notion of the subject. If Weizsäcker is correct in his analysis of the human condition then I would like to suggest that his insights also reflect a basic truth about any human linguistic discourse, which obviously must be understood on the ground of human experience as the interdependence between perception and movement, body and mind. Hence I will build on his model and use it as a hermeneutic model for an interstitial trinitarian theology.

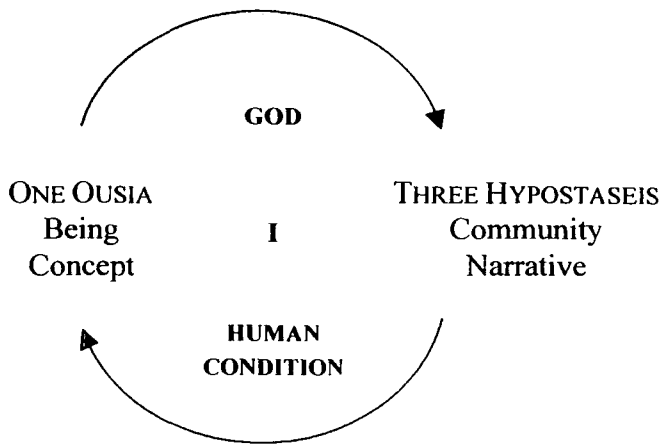
The first aspect about the inseparable unity of perception and movement can be compared with the already mentioned dialectic between *ousia* and *hypostasis*. The relationship between the two must not be seen as a connection between two separate entities. Both need each other in a way of mutual hiddenness and representation. On the one hand, to "perceive" God and therefore to speak meaningfully about the divine nature at all, presupposes that God somehow "moves", that is speaks and makes himself known within the human condition. This, however, as it was argued in Chapter Two, can only reasonably be claimed within the framework of the belief in a triune God. Without the Spirit (accommodating himself to the thought framework of human beings) and Jesus as God incarnate it is hardly intelligible to maintain the notion of revelation and hence to speak within human discourse about the transcendent creator God. On the other hand, to speak of divine "movement" and therefore of the Spirit and of Jesus as truly God, one is in need of "perceiving" this "movement" as one and same thing. Hence theology needs *ousia*-talk in order to claim intelligibly, for instance, that Jesus really *is* God. Both must be said that God lets himself 'be perceived' in our theological reflections as the one *ousia* (using conceptual language to describe God's nature) and as three *hypostaseis*, as persons who are distinct (using narrative language in order to describe God's social behaviour). It is the one nature and simultaneously the three persons we reflect upon in theological discourse which depends on the process of

human experience. If one focuses on the *ousia*-dimension of God-talk, trying to depict the divine nature in a coherent system and thought framework, the *hypostasis*-dimension slides into the background and the particularities and distinctions of the three persons are hidden. And if one focuses on the *hypostasis*-dimension of God-talk, trying to depict the divine communion as three distinct persons who interact with one another and as such with human beings, then the *ousia*-dimension slides into the background. This then might be characterised as mutual representation and substitution. Within such a GESTALTKREIS HERMENEUTICS one rather speaks of God as the *circle of divine life* allowing a fruitful relationship and creative tension within theological discourse between the two dimensions of *ousia* and *hypostasis*.

The second aspect parallels Weizsäcker's notion of the unity of the I and its environment despite their difference. Within anthropology it is his conviction that every human being stands opposite its environment but at the same time is also part of it and only due to an encounter between the I and its environment perception and movement is being realized. This point also emphasises the fact that although a human being is an individual and distinct from others, he only is and can be a person by way of being connected with the others in the act of movement and perception. Transferred to a theological hermeneutics it can be claimed that while God stands opposite the creation, he nevertheless is connected with it (in Jesus Christ and in his accommodation to the human condition through the Spirit) and can, on linguistic grounds, only be perceived and understood within the realm of language which is embedded in human experience. The point here is rather simple, namely to remember that theological discourse can only utter words about God because there is a creation. God is in relation with this creation and only due to this relatedness, although he remains the other, can we speak about God at all. God-talk and human-talk are fused with one another so that it seems advisable to develop any doctrine of God only in direct connection with discourse about the human condition. This also implies for both levels (talk about the human condition and talk about God) that one cannot speak of the whole of reality without simultaneously speaking about the particular persons and one cannot speak about the persons without simultaneously speaking about the whole of reality.

Finally, the last aspect describes the GESTALTKREIS as an open process. The biological act is a continuous flow of life in which every person has to find herself in every event anew. This does not mean relativity but rather that the outcome of the process of life always depends on the interaction of both perception and movement.

This outcome can never be resolved in advance and for all times. Since I am concerned with a hermeneutical device this aspect can be depicted as pointing towards the openness of every reflection on the doctrine of God. However, as I have shown with respect to Weizsäcker, the task of the human person is to find its balance. And this balance will most likely be found and upheld, without it ceasing to be a process, the more attentive a person is to her relational structure. Theological discourse then is an open process in the sense that our perception of God always has to be reworked and restated in relation to the human condition. A more fully developed trinitarian GESTALTKREIS HERMENEUTICS can be visualised in the following way.



Graph 12: Trinitarian Gestaltkreis

This graph summarizes what I now want to call an interstitial theology. Above all it clearly highlights the fact that for human discourse God never can be perceived as an objective entity, person, or principle outside of human experience. The theologian as one particular "I" stands within the human condition in the middle of the GESTALTKREIS. First, looking at the inner field, in her enterprise to elaborate an understanding of God (depending on her embeddedness in human experience), she must be attentive to the human condition in distinction from God. Such attentiveness involves both the working out of how this condition determines her own project and the clarification of language, i.e. in what way her God-talk is meaningful because it simply is a product of the human condition. Second, looking at the outer circle, she must creatively relate the notion of one ousia and three hypostaseis and let both inform each other, neither confusing nor creating a logical priority between them. Finally, although

this should be self-explanatory because it is automatically implied in the relationship between the I and the human other, this endeavour, being executed within the community of believers, learns from the tradition and simultaneously contributes to it, prompting and enhancing an enriching revelatory process in which God truly and meaningfully comes to speech.[35] Retrospectively it can now be seen, and hopefully appreciated more fully, that all along the thesis was attempting to execute this GESTALTKREIS HERMENEUTICS which grew out of the retrieval of an appropriate concept of human experience.

5.4 *IMAGO DEI* OR HOW THINGS HANG TOGETHER

Before proposing a final reflection on the Trinity and human life I would like to change the perspective one last time and look at the GESTALTKREIS through the lens of the doctrine of *imago dei*. Much has already been said about the interrelationship between experience and revelation and about the human condition in Chapters Two and Three. To revisit these issues here and to spell out how they shape an understanding of being created in the image of God will help us to see more clearly how things are related within an interstitial theology. The final proposal, then, will not only be seen as a justifiable way of presenting the doctrine of the Trinity but also as most promising if theologians attempt to draw practical implications for human life.

To begin with it can be claimed that the doctrine of *imago dei* wants to say something about the close and inseparable relationship between God and human beings. Biblical anthropology when it talks about human life never disconnects the question of what it is to be human from the question of how and who God is. The Bible reflects on the role of human beings in relation to God or considers their place before God.[36] To say something about God always implies saying something about the human condition

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[35] Ian Markham in his recent work *A Theology of Engagement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) has suggested that we understand engagement as an encounter that subsequently shapes the theology itself. Although I do agree with his longing for a more engaged theology that also learns from other religions and the secular world (my GESTALTKREIS model makes a lot of space for many of his issues), I disagree with his presupposition that an engaged theology has to work with theism *disentangled* from – and therefore in many parts leaving behind – the conviction that God is a trinity. Markham's assessment of trinitarian theology versus theistic theology is misconstrued and oversimplified and leads him to the false assumption that the doctrines of the Trinity and of the Incarnation are somehow opposed to "engagement" standing in the way for proper dialogue with other religions. In this respect I think that my trinitarian interstitial theology is more capable of engagement because it can deal with the central beliefs of Christianity and also makes space for "the religious other" and "the secular other" as being part of the same human condition participating in the capacity for truth inherent in human experience.

[36] For a brief summary, Werner Schmidt, 'At.liche Anthropologie', *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon*, Band 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 156-8.

and vice versa. Human beings are seen as created by God and are marked by a special relationship with God. For the Old Testament in particular there is no interest in articulating an autonomous notion of humanness.[37] Humanness is always Yahwistic humanness and unthinkable outside the relationship with Yahweh.[38] Taking all this into account, it can be said that the biblical notion of being created in the image of God focuses on relationship and therefore does not signify *something* that human beings possess (for instance a particular body, gender, reason) which in turn would determine and signify them as having the image of God.[39] Wilfried Härle summarizes that being created in the image of God means human existence face to face and in relation to God. This purpose is given to human beings with their existence and they correspond to it by living accordingly, that is by acknowledging this fact and thus living in a responsible relationship with God.[40] This God, however, is trinitarian life. 'For Christian understanding, it is *from* the Trinity all things derive, *within* the Trinity all things exist and *towards* the Trinity all things are oriented.'[41] Therefore, God is experienced and described by human beings in terms of loving relations, as a God who responds, cares, and loves. Being created in the image of God then means first of all that human beings as relational beings, who are capable of loving relationships, are an image of God. Image then means an illustration, a visualisation, and a form of realisation of God's trinitarian nature because human beings depend on and therefore live in this relationship, whether they acknowledge or deny it.[42] In the light of the image of an embrace, which we have employed in the previous chapter, it might then be said that the notion "image of God" points to the fact that human beings are destined to exist as appropriate creaturely illustrations of the triune life[43] and as such respond meaningfully to God's embrace. Consequently, the doctrine of being created in the image of God captures the crucial insight that human beings exist not as self-contained and isolated

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[37] Cf. Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropologie des Alten Testaments* (München: Kaiser, 1973), esp. 233-5.
[38] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 450.
[39] Cf. G. v. Rad's comments that the Old Testament statement about the image of God in Genesis 1.26-27 does not contain any explanation of what concrete form this "being created in the image of God" takes. The main focus rather is on "created for what?", an intended purpose: *Theologie des AT*, 1:148-51. See also Martin Honecker, *Einführung in die theologische Ethik* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), 48-9; Ulrich Körtner, *Evangelische Sozialethik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 213-4.
[40] *Dogmatik*, 435. See also Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 2:58-9.
[41] Paul Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology in Pragmatist Perspective*, 193.
[42] Cf. Härle, *Dogmatik*, 436. See also Pannenberg who uses „image of God" as a general signification for the intended purpose of human beings to be in communion with God: *Anthropologie in theologischer Perspektive*, 71.
[43] Christof Gestrich, *Die Wiederkehr des Glanzes in der Welt. Die christliche Lehre von der Sünde und ihrer Vergebung in gegenwärtiger Verantwortung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1989), 69.

beings but as exocentric beings who only are what they are in relation to God and to other human beings.

This interpretation can be linked with the discussion of the human condition in Chapter Three. On different levels we have seen that a human person is relational which means that she is not only exocentric in regard to its own psychological identity but also with respect to a transcendent reality.[44] Pannenberg rightly concludes that human beings in their openness to the world and in their search for identity always remain exocentric. They are related to other selves and to a beyond being. The question of self-identity and the question of divine reality belong inescapably together.[45] This was further affirmed on three different levels. First, Viktor Frankl's psychological analysis highlighted the will to meaning which was linked to a concept of *Übersinn* (super-meaning). To be human, he argued, means to be related to a meaning and to be capable of responding to it. This relationship, however, gains full intelligibility only if it is seen in combination with a notion of transcendence.[46] Second, Viktor von Weizsäcker's notion of *GESTALTKREIS* as the framework for human relationality and self-understanding pointed to a completion yet to come. Crisis as a key experience of human life longs for a balance which allows human beings to flourish and live meaningfully.[47] Finally, Emmanuel Levinas drew our attention to the insight that "being" signifies *the-one-for-the-other*. This "for-the-other" structure in responsibility is prior to ontology and thus the fundamental ground for being human before all questioning and knowing.[48] If these insights are read through the prism of theological anthropology, taking into account what was said about the relationship between experience and revelation, one gains a clearer picture of how it may be claimed that everything hangs together in the doctrine of *imago dei*. By taking for granted that human beings only can wholly be themselves and find their true identity in relation to God by participating in God's embrace, I propose the following interpretation.

First, if a) being, as Levinas suggests, signifies a "one-for-the-other structure in responsibility" that lies *beyond* all human knowing and if b) this being points to the level of reality which is constituted by God for self-experiencing subjects rather than to reality as merely experienced from within, then, the triune divine life comes immediately to the fore as the most appropriate description of this ground of being. To

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[44] Cf. Chapter Three, sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3.
[45] *Anthropologie in theologischer Perspektive*, esp. 66-70.
[46] Cf. Chapter Three, subsection 3.4.2.4.
[47] Cf. Chapter Three, subsection 3.4.3.6.
[48] Cf. Chapter Three, subsection 3.4.4.3.

be created in the image of God, which can be understood as an inalienable gift, means to live out and enact this gift of human relationality in accordance with the divine life to the highest possible degree. The image of God as the gift of being destined to love and live reconciled relations cannot be taken away. However, the image of God can be seen more or less clearly among human beings: it can shine through us or be distorted. Moreover, to be human means *to be relational*, expressing truth about the reality of the human condition as it is given to us by God. This reality already reveals something about God's good intention for this world and consequently gives us a glimpse into the divine heart. Being created in the image of God then means to live human life in accordance to this condition and by doing so praising God for the gift of creation and human life.

Second, if Frankl's notion of meaning, which depends on a transcendent *Übersinn* and through which human persons are able to cope with their lives in *all* circumstances, is a true interpretation of the human condition, then, the description of triune life as other embracing, hence transforming the language of exclusion with its inherent notions of fear and despair, suggests itself as the most appropriate interpretation for the ground of Frankl's *Übersinn*. Meaning can be found everywhere, precisely because God as love which is opposed to exclusion that distorts human life, is responsive and attentive to all circumstances. To be created in the image of God from this perspective means to be able to relate one's own human will to meaning to the fullness of divine meaning and by doing so to experience a transformation of life which participates in God's purposes for human life. Additionally, to be relational also means to be in becoming and to be open towards an ultimate meaning. This meaning reaches beyond the reality that human beings experience from within and is therefore in need for revelation to occur. For human experience divine revelation finds its most appropriate theological expression and consequently its most meaningful description in God's trinitarian life. Hence, being created in the image of God means to live out human relational life as best as possible in relation to the divine triune life. The working out of a recognizable image of God, therefore, is in constant need of revelation to occur, which, as we have seen, depends on the process of experience. This is why an account of the trinitarian life and of human life should go hand in hand.[49]

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[49] Cf. Miroslav Volf, 'The Trinity Is Our Social Program: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement', *Modern Theology* 14 (1998), 403-23. 'As I see it, the question is not whether the Trinity should serve as a model for human community; the question is rather in which respect and to what extent it should do so' (p. 405). Based on the limits of human creatureliness and sinfulness, Volf argues that conceptual construction of the correspondence between the Trinity and human life 'must go back and

5.5 THE TRINITY AND HUMAN LIFE

The aim of this part is to present a final account of the Trinity in relation to human life. I will pursue this task by presenting four reflections. Each reflection is placed in the interstice between two opposite notions of human experience which are derived from the discussion in Chapter Four where the metaphors of "relationships come first", "unbroken relationship", "lasting embrace" and "third-party responsibility" came to the fore as characteristics of the divine triune life. Each reflection is divided into three paragraphs. While paragraph A in each case briefly attempts to describe the Trinity as a divine embrace, paragraph B intends to relate this Trinity-talk to the human condition, trying to spell out in which way they are correlated without abandoning their difference. The final paragraph C respectively then tries to draw practical implication for human life and the Christian community. However, it has to be kept in mind that human life, religious experience, and our perception of God are too complex and ultimately resist systematisation. Therefore, the following reflections have to be read as an open unity in which each reflection depends on and has to be viewed in the light of the others.

5.5.1 Between reconciliation and brokenness

A. The divine embrace between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit displays a communion of unbroken relationship. This "unbrokenness," because in God no un-fathering, un-soning, and un-spiriting takes place, points to a oneness of integrated otherness and reconciled particularity. The triune life embraces within itself in the most meaningful way both particularity and otherness. To render such unbroken oneness meaningful I want to call the divine embrace a reconciled community. Admittedly, it is unusual to use the concept of reconciliation for the Trinity. We are so used to employing it exclusively either for inter-human relationships or within the doctrine of reconciliation. However, given the argument of the thesis as a whole, one should not shy away from using it.[50] If one employs the notion of reconciliation for the divine triune life, this

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forth on a two-way street, both from above and below' (p.405). For a negative example where this interstice is left and the distinctions between ousia and hypostasis as well as divine and human are confused: Thomas Smail, 'In the Image of the Triune God', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5 (2003), 22-32.

[50] Cf. Chapter Three, subsection 2.3.2.2 where I argued for a creative interaction between metaphorical and conceptual language in order to enhance our understanding of God. Cf. also Nicholas Wolterstorff's helpful discussion in regard to justice and the Trinity: 'Is there Justice in the Trinity', in M. Volf und M. Welker (eds.), *God's Life in Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 177-87.

crucial experience of human life can lead to a creative tension within theological discourse that might indeed augment our understanding of being created in the image of God.[51] Hence particularity and otherness in God do not entail fragmentation, enmity, fear, or threat, indicating an unconditioned love and respect for-the-other, therefore, an eternal event of divine reconciliation.

B. In relation to the human condition, God, in his unbroken oneness of integrated otherness and reconciled particularity, exercises an embrace which grants human beings the possibility of integrating the other into one's own life and of valuing each other's particularity. By participating in the divine embrace as the ground of being and through the will to meaning, human reconciliation becomes a real possibility. While integrated otherness and reconciled particularity characterise the divine life as a complete and perfected act of being-ness, within human life as the "spinning coin" integrated otherness amounts to reconciling particularity, which indicates personhood's essential need for balance within the human relational condition. This is always an open state of affairs, always under threat, never complete. Human life, therefore, exhibits both ambiguous otherness (including experiences of threat, strangeness, insecurity, and overstrain) and ambiguous particularity (including experiences of scarcity, competition, comparison, pride, envy). However, the possibility of experiencing reconciliation is a real possibility because of human being's relatedness to God's integrated otherness and reconciled particularity. This implies both the possibility of integrating the other into one's own life (without the necessity of reducing him to the same) and the possibility of relating one's own particularities to the fullness of the divine life (without the necessity of feeling inferior, deficient or incomplete). Thus human reconciliation can be experienced within broken human relationships as a concrete realisation of overcoming mutual threat, fear, and strangeness, or scarcity, devaluating competition, and envy.

C. Being created in the image of the triune God means realizing one's own human integrated otherness and living towards reconciling particularity. This must be enacted within a human community by looking into each other's faces, that is to take others seriously and really engage with them. To reflect the divine embrace as a "running towards" and "hugging each other" means to make space for the other in order to

[51] Cf. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:161: 'the Father begets the Son and freely breathes his Spirit; the Spirit liberates the Father for the Son and the Son from and for the Father; the Son is begotten and liberated, and so reconciles the Father with the future his Spirit is.'

overcome enmity between persons or groups or at least to create peaceful balances. Christian communities, on the level of worship, might ask themselves if their services and various meetings leave room for looking into the other's face. The Holy Communion might be an ideal place to mirror divine reconciled otherness within the congregation as a social reality where God looks into our faces and transforms our lives precisely through us - looking into other faces, being responsive to others and valuing their presence.[52] On the level of leadership churches might ask whether or not they are aware of ambiguous particularity and the experiences of scarcity, competition, comparison, pride, and envy. Where and how do we make room and nurture the possibility for "reconciling encounters" and foster the integration of the other into one's own life?[53]

5.5.2 Between love and fear

A. The divine embrace between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit tells a story in which relationships come first. Because there is no un-fathering, un-soning, and un-spiriting, the other is always kept in the other's heart. The divine persons exercise caring and loving relationships and express a oneness of love. There is no space for any Angst-structure and hence no space for any life distorting reality. To render this oneness of love meaningful I want to call the divine embrace a communal event where there is no fear but happiness and contentedness take place. This then points to an eternal event of divine love and happiness.

B. In relation to the human condition, God, in his oneness of love exercises an embrace which grants human beings the possibility of overcoming and coping with fear and despair. While in God there is no Angst-structure, the human Angst-structure is part of the human condition. Hence, human beings have fear; they are in need of healing and happiness. However, human beings as exocentric and as being responsive have the

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[52] This seems to be a pressing issue and must be addressed by churches especially within ecumenical dialogue. Cf. Roisin Hannaway, 'Eucharist and Reconciliation', in Michael Hurley, SJ (ed.), *Reconciliation in Religion and Society* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1994), 189-93; John Pretty, 'Eucharist and Reconciliation', in M. Hurley (ed.), *Reconciliation*, 194-98.

[53] This connects with other concerns, for instance, Cecelia Clegg's assessment 'that Christian churches and faith communities have largely left out of account the social dimension of a theology of reconciliation, preferring to concentrate on the personal dimension': 'Between Embrace and Exclusion', *New Blackfriars* 85 (2004), 83. Cf. also Gerry O'Hanlon, 'Justice and Reconciliation', in M. Hurley (ed.), *Reconciliation*, 48-67; Geoffrey Wainwright, 'Ecumenism and Reconciliation', in M. Hurley (ed.), *Reconciliation*, 72-88.

possibility of 'going beyond' creaturely reality and relate their experiences of fear to the divine life where creaturely fear will ultimately be sublated in God's love. Although this does not dissolve the Angst-structure, it increases the likelihood of positively dealing with experiences of ambiguous particularity and threatening otherness. Therefore the experience of overcoming fear and despair on the level of the "spinning coin dimension" is a real possibility. This possibility depends on a balanced correlation and interaction between, on the one hand, the acceptance of the human Angst structure and, on the other, the non-acceptance of the experience of fear as an ultimate reality by relating it to the divine life and thus transcending the human reality. Thus happiness and contentedness can be experienced within human life that is always exposed to fear.

C. Being created in the image of the triune God means to open oneself up towards divine love and happiness and deal with the experience of human fear and despair accordingly. To reflect the divine embrace is to work towards the minimization of experiences of life-distorting fear and to provide space for exocentric human beings to experience divine salvation. Christian communities, on the level of worship, might ask themselves if they provide enough space within their liturgies (through participation, symbols, rituals, texts) to enhance the possibilities for people to relate their fears to God's love in order to find contentedness in God. On the level of leadership churches might ask themselves whether or not their structures, the distribution of power, and their execution of authority are instances and examples of "reconciling particularity" or rather feed on concepts of "threatening otherness" and hence increase experiences of fear, despair, and dissatisfaction.[54]

5.5.3 Between abundance and scarcity

A. The divine embrace between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit pictures a lasting embrace. The divine communion is enduring and everlasting. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exercise a lasting communion, celebrate a feast of life, therefore expressing a oneness of absolute meaning and abundance. In God there is no scarcity and fragmentation. To render this oneness of meaning and abundance significant I want to point to the notion of fullness which is often characterised in Jesus' narrative theology as a feast or a

[54] Theologians who are concerned with reconciliation between groups and peoples indicate the problem of threatening otherness: Mary Grey, 'To Struggle with a Reconciled Heart: Reconciliation and Justice', *New Blackfriars* 85 (2004), 56-73; Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 57-98.

wedding celebration. The Trinity then expresses divine love as overflowing abundance where meaning can be found. The triune life as overflowing abundance is opposed to scarcity which manifests itself as a distorting power in claiming insufficiency and lack of meaning as the essence of reality. This indicates a wholeness where nothing is lost, nobody is forgotten or excluded, and where complete meaning is realised, therefore, an eternal event of abundance.

B. In relation to the human condition, God, in his oneness of meaning and abundance exercises an embrace which grants human beings the possibility of finding both meaning despite the experience of fragmentation and plentifulness despite the experience of scarcity. While fullness in God in all its dimensions is an actual and perfect reality, within the human condition human life is subjected to the experience of fragmentation and scarcity. To be human means to be in becoming. Human life is never complete, therefore fragmented and open to meaninglessness and hopelessness. However, it also means to be open toward an ultimate meaning. Human experience of meaningful life, even in situations of despair and nothingness, when related to the divine fullness, becomes a real possibility. The experience of scarcity within the human condition, although not annihilated, is transformed by making space for experiences of "plentiful-ness" and "enough". In relation to the fact that to be human also means to be responsible for a reconciling social-system, the notion of abundance not only points to God's essence as fullness of life but also to the distorting power of the concept of scarcity if it is given ultimate meaning. In relation to God's triune life, divine abundance grants the possibility of a human social-system in which everybody is granted access to life and shares in the "enough" or "plentifulness" of human life as it is given by God.[55] Thus abundance can be experienced within scarcity as a concrete reality if a person anchors her incomplete and fragmented life in God's life and consequently participates in God's fullness and thereby receives meaning and purpose.

C. Being created in the image of the triune God means to realize one's own openness to meaning and fullness by relating one's own experiences of fragmentation to divine fullness. This must be enacted within a human community by depriving claims of

[55] Cf. Douglas Meeks' account of "God and Scarcity" in his *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 170-7. These insights then certainly must inform other discourses. Cf. Duncan B. Forrester, 'Politics and Reconciliation', in M. Hurley (ed.), *Reconciliation*, 111-22.

scarcity and fragmentation of any right and claim to represent the ultimate reality of the human condition. This includes, to name two powerful examples, one-sided notions of health as the absence of sickness – perceiving sickness and the process of senescence as diminished life and therefore as not as meaningful and valuable as healthy life – and one-sided notions of scarcity that function as engines for a global economy – portraying human beings as half empty glasses that are always in need for more in order to become happier and to find meaning. To reflect the divine embrace is to live out the meaningfulness of creaturely life and the plentifulness of creation. Christian communities, on the level of worship, might ask themselves whether or not their services are signs of hope, celebrations of divine life and abundance of human life despite experiences of scarcity and fragmentation in which people of all circumstances, young or old, full of energy or sick, are valued and cared for, finding meaning in life for their respective and various situations. On the level of leadership churches might ask themselves whether or not their structures are helpful in this respect and whether or not the various groups, clubs and meetings offered in a church are reflections of abundance where meaning can be found.

5.5.4 Between exclusion and assimilation

A. The divine embrace between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is enacted within a threeness (third party) that expresses a communion of responsibility. A divine person is always responsive to the second and to the third party. Hence they never lose sight of each other, expressing a oneness of non-exclusion and non-assimilation. To render this oneness meaningful we have to tell a story in which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit act in complete responsibility and live a communion in which the other is given enough space to be unique. The divine embrace leaves no space for exclusion and no space for assimilation. Otherness and particularity are neither reduced to sameness nor equated with estrangement. This indicates perfect responsibility, giving oneself freely to the other without losing oneself, therefore, an eternal event of responsiveness.

B. In relation to the human condition, God, in his oneness of non-exclusion and non-assimilation, exercises an embrace which grants human beings who have fear and experience ambiguous otherness and particularity the possibility of human love as a growing together in mutual respect. While the loving divine embrace exhibits a perfect

balance between otherness and sameness and between "non-exclusion" and "non-assimilation", human life is subjected to ambiguous otherness and particularity. While God is love, human beings have fear and in their relationships therefore rather exhibit "excluding otherness" and "assimilating sameness." Hence human beings love insofar as they lovingly deal with this condition and realize relationships of mutual respect. Human experience of love then manifests itself in human interactions which reflect the divine embrace. This is a real possibility and can be experienced among people as a concrete realisation of a mutual process of growing together. If human beings (due to their exocentric nature) acknowledge the relational structure of the "human coin" and thereby value and respect otherness and particularity and if they ground their lives and their perception of reality in God's triune life, then, to live a balanced relatedness between otherness and sameness becomes a real possibility. Thus love and mutual respect can be experienced as a peaceful and reconciled balance of human relationships within the conditions of exclusion and assimilation.

C. Being created in the image of the triune God means to realize love in the interstice between exclusion and assimilation. This is enacted within a human community by working towards respectful relationships in which the other, as an essential part of one's life, is not perceived as a threat and hence given enough space to live, neither excluded from being part of my life nor absorbed into my life. This might be enacted within a human community by a mutual and respectful being-there-for-the-other attitude. To reflect the divine embrace is to turn towards each other, walk together, look into each other's eyes, and to face problems with each other rather than to turn away, walk against, look away, and to make faces. It means to make space for the other and foster and nurture possibilities of mutual dialogue in which (first of all) listening is exercised as an act of self-giving. Encounters are steered by a longing for mutual respect and an attempt to reduce fear (due to strangeness, unfamiliarity, oddity, novelty, and therefore often accompanied by misapprehension and prejudice) in order to create spaces where the other and I can live. Christian communities, on the level of worship, might ask themselves whether or not they respond to God by responding to each other's needs, fears, problems, and concerns. Are our services a one-way street or do they take up what really matters, relating human life to God's life and God's life to human life? Worship as an experience in the interstice? Furthermore, they might ask themselves whether or not they are aware of the problems of exclusion (God's or the human other's otherness

perceived as a threat and therefore excluded from the conversation) and assimilation (God's or the human other's sameness absorbed and domesticated and therefore perceived as my own). All this can be seen reflected in the church's liturgies: words that are used or abandoned, hymns chosen or left out, symbols included or excluded, participation made possible or impossible. On the level of leadership churches might ask themselves whether or not appropriate structures of accountability between persons, groups, committees, and churches are in place in order to realize a reconciling social reality. Do their meetings leave room for listening? Listening is in need of encounters; encounters are in need of looking into each other's face and of exercising responsibility. However, whether a mutual dialogue as a reflection of the divine embrace can de facto take place or not is very often decided by the table order: Who sits at the top and who at the bottom of the table? Who is invited? Whose agenda is on the table? What food is on the table? Whose table manners have to be followed? If these questions are answered in relation to the divine triune life then we can return full circle to the start of the first reflection. It is the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who sets the table, who invites human beings to sit at the table of life and who determines the table rules. Working out the agenda of the triune God for human life is not easy and will always be under construction, but it surely will lead to practical consequences for the construction of human sociality.

CONCLUSION

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The overarching aim of this work has been twofold: first, to challenge contemporary trinitarian theology because of its neglect of human experience and, second, simultaneously to develop a new approach that is more attentive to the human condition and theology's embeddedness in experience. This aim was nourished by the observation that trinitarian theologians who favour a social doctrine of the Trinity in order to draw practical implications for human life often end up with utopian or idealistic visions of what human communion in the light of the Trinity should look like (Chapter One). Not enough attention was given to the relationship between God-talk and the human condition as distinct from, yet related to, the divine triune reality. The task of elaborating a new trinitarian hermeneutics led me to an investigation of the concepts of experience and revelation (Chapter Two), the human condition (Chapter Three), and the importance of biblical narratives for God-talk (Chapter Four). This process resulted in proposing an interstitial theology as creative tension which, employing a *Gestaltkreis Hermeneutics*, enabled me to relate trinitarian God-talk to human life and vice versa in a way which is both meaningful for human experience and faithful to the Bible and the Christian tradition (Chapter Five). With respect to the question of truth such an interstitial theology remains intellectually honest in holding together both i) God's otherness (which escapes altogether human experience and language) and hence the tentativeness of all theological discourse and ii) God's sameness (which accommodates itself to human experience and language), expressed in the notion of experience's capacity for truth, and hence the adequacy and truth shaping meaningfulness of theological discourse within the human condition.

In retrospect, then, the following comparison might be drawn. While Moltmann prioritises the narrative over the concept (trinitarian personhood language over against ousia language, developing a historic doctrine of the Trinity according to the New Testament), and LaCugna somewhere in a confusing middle position opts for the logical priority of Scripture as revelation over against general human experience and conceptual ousia language (a certain understanding of salvation history becomes equated with theology proper), it can be said that Gunton prioritises the concept over the narrative (elaborating a sophisticated ontology of relationality). In contrast, an interstitial theology as creative tension tries to be attentive to all

these different levels of discourse and places itself in the interstice not to opt for a new universal concept but to be aware of the fact that within theological discourse prioritising one dimension over the other (concept – narrative, revelation – experience, ousia – hypostasis) will not do. An interstitial theology avoids playing one dimension off against another. Due to the condition of human experience and its inherent language games both *ousia* and *hypostasis, universality* and *particularity, the narrative* and *the concept* irreducibly need each other. The consequence of all this is that a trinitarian *Gestaltkreis hermeneutics* when it comes to the relationship between the Trinity and human life attempts not to confuse the two realms but to leave enough space for divine and human otherness. Thus I conclude that contemporary trinitarian theology ultimately is not radical enough because it fails to sustain this vital "in-between" place. Instead of logical conclusions and the tendency either to downplay human experience in favour of metaphysics or to simply priorities revelation history over against more conceptual approaches, what is really needed is theological discourse that maintains a creative tension. Ironically, despite the many allusions to *the mystery of God*, many trinitarian theologians, by giving supremacy either to the One or to the Three, develop integrative accounts thereby rather explaining away the mystery of God which manifests itself precisely in the dialectic between *one ousia* and *three hypostaseis*. What really is required is an interstitial theology which claims that this creative tension is actually a part of the mystery of God. Trinitarian theology then is aware of its limits. In acknowledging this tension as part of God's mystery the here presented trinitarian theology is able to engage more fully with the doctrine of the Trinity in relation to human life. This is particularly important with respect to practical implications for human life.

To conclude, let me end on a note of prospect and give one example to highlight an avenue that seems particularly promising in taking this work forwards. This avenue leads in the direction of a social critique and an engagement with economy. It was already mentioned that Moltmann, although interested in political theology, neglected in his trinitarian work power structures and the question of authority as an inherent part of the human condition. This, however, is a crucial point for anyone who wants to constructively engage in a critique of social structures. An interstitial trinitarian theology concentrates on how the givenness of human relationality is and can be realised by persons who live their lives as being created in the image of the divine embrace. The notion of communion understood as an abstract ontological concept or as a general givenness of human life, therefore, slips into the background and makes way for other concepts which are more informative for human

experience. Building on the essential notions of otherness and particularity, which are constitutive for the human condition and also meaningful for God-talk, I was able to explore different core experiences of human life and relate them meaningfully to the divine triune life. An interstitial theology is now capable of drawing attention to the actual event of human relationships and how they are realised. Trinitarian reflections of human life then do not disregard the human condition as such. It is not helpful to simply stigmatise human experiences of power, authority, dependence, competition, and inequality. These experiences simply exhibit constitutive parts of the human condition and are not as such good or evil. Much more pressing is the question whether these experiences necessarily have to lead to distorting relationships, to experiences of fear, mistrust, exploitation, and the exclusion of some for the sake of others. A first step forward, therefore, would be to take up a dialogue with the concepts of power and authority in conversation with the insights from the human condition in Chapter Three and relate both with one another. The results can then be connected with the reflections about the Trinity and human life in order to sharpen the focus of the role of power and authority within a human community that consists of human beings who are created in the image of God. If the divine embrace, in respecting each other's particularity and valuing otherness, neither excluding nor assimilating, is a loving *Gestaltkreis*, then such discourse will influence our understanding of power and authority as the underlying concepts for any attempt in describing how Christian *koinonia* should take shape.

As a second step and closely related to this, an examination of economic ideologies and structures could be attempted. To connect a trinitarian understanding of the divine triune life with economy might seem far off at first sight but, as I would like to argue, is not at all the case. One simply needs to remember that the divine embrace between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exhibits a portrayal of what theology calls the *economic* Trinity, that is God with us as he reveals himself within the human condition. In other words, talk about the economic Trinity is also talk about the ways in which the Father, the Son, and the Spirit manage the divine household in relation to humanity. The reflections on the divine embrace in the previous chapter, therefore, express essential characteristics of this household management.

Consequently, human economy can be characterised as a global household of persons in communion that must be managed in the image of the triune God. Economic concepts ground very much in certain presuppositions about particularity (individualism), the understanding of the self and the other, as well as meaning and, as negative counterparts, fear and scarcity. Concepts of power and authority as well as economic structures, grounded in concepts of

sharing, of giving and receiving, presupposing a certain kind of gift theory, are part of any human community. But the question is, how are they shaped and what are the underlying presuppositions or ideologies? Human life is relational and therefore all communities have to come to terms with an understanding of the above-mentioned concepts. If a trinitarian understanding of God is the Christian way of demythologising God concepts and absolute frameworks of meaning that underlie ideological uses of power and economic assumptions, then we have to set an understanding of divine oneness as integrated otherness and reconciled particularity which gains meaning in trinitarian stories of love, healing, reconciliation, abundance and non-exclusion over against claims made about power and market rules in modern society.[1] The proposed reading of the Trinity and human life in this thesis then can be taken forward and lead to some relevant implications for human life in order to challenge our understanding of communitarian and economic life in the image of the Trinity.

[1] Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 1989), 9. See also Jörg Rieger (ed.), *Liberating the Future: God, Mammon and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

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